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Preacher: Andy Hambleton

[0 : 00] Verses 1 to 11, just to remind you that we're looking at this evening. Let's just have a brief moment of prayer before we look at these words. Father, we thank you so much for our Lord Jesus.

Thank you for all that we will learn of him as we read these wonderful words of the Apostle Paul's in Philippians 2. And Father, I pray that as I speak that you would give me the words to say, that you would give us each heart which are glad to hear your words to us and quick to respond in faithful obedience to our Lord Jesus.

And Father, we pray all of these things in his name. Amen. Well, the question really which I suppose leads us in to this passage of the Bible is as follows.

How does a church stay united? How does a church stay joyful as it faces difficulties? The church that Paul is writing to in these words of Philippians 2, obviously the church of Philippi, is a church going through a time of great difficulty as Paul writes this letter to them.

Just in the previous few verses at the end of chapter 1, Paul has mentioned some of the opposition that they're facing from the world around them. And yet, this is a letter of joy.

[1 : 15] That's what Philippians is famous for, isn't it? The letter all about joy and also unity in the church. Maybe a lesser known aspect of this letter. Joy and unity really sum up so much of what Paul has to say in this letter.

So the question is, how can a church, going through difficult times, such as facing opposition, facing difficulty, facing setbacks or disappointments, how can a church like that continue to be joyful and united with one another?

Maybe it's a situation you find yourselves in here. Obviously, I'm a visitor. I don't know everything that this church is facing. Maybe you've gone through difficult times. Maybe individually you've gone through a difficult time in the past.

And the question in your mind might be, how can I be joyful as a Christian? How can I be united with other believers when I go through such a difficult time in life? These words are really there to answer that question for us.

And in order to try and get our heads around this passage, I want you to imagine this following picture, which we're going to keep referring back to throughout the sermon. The structure of the passage is fairly complex.

[2 : 22] And therefore, I hope that as we have this picture in mind, it helps us to understand the flow of Paul's thought here. So I want you to imagine a building with three stories in it. A ground floor, a middle floor and a top floor.

And that building represents a Christian congregation. Obviously, in particular, it's representing the Philippian congregation here. And yet any Christian congregation would have the same arrangement of these three floors.

It really doesn't matter which church we're speaking about. This applies to every church and it applies to the evangelical church as well. Three floors, ground, middle and top. And there's a lift in the building.

You can take this lift to any of the three floors. And if you like, the Apostle Paul, who's writing this letter, is the lift attendant. He's the bellboy who's going to operate the lift for us.

He's going to show us around the building. So to start with, we're all getting to the lift with one another. It's obviously a fairly big lift for all of us to squeeze in there. And the Apostle Paul says to us, First of all, I'm going to show you the top floor of this building.

[3 : 26] So we're going to start from the top and move down. And he presses the button, the doors close, and we start to ascend. Eventually we come to a halt and the doors open and we step out onto the top floor of this building.

And as we step out, Paul says, This top floor is called the blessings of fellowship. We read about the top floor in verse 1 of chapter 2 of Philippians.

Just read that verse again. Paul says, Now the if that he keeps using is obviously rhetorical.

He's not questioning whether these things exist. He's telling us the reality of them. And what he's doing is he's showing to us the blessings of fellowship that exist on that top floor of the building.

He starts by saying, Is there any encouragement from being united with Christ? And obviously, yes, there is. Remember, he's writing to struggling, suffering Christians.

[4 : 31] He wants them to remember all the encouragement that comes to them through being united through Christ. There is encouragement in knowing that Christ has been tempted in every way that you and I are tempted, and yet without sin.

There's encouragement in knowing that anything that we suffer in this life, be that emotionally, physically, or spiritually, that Christ himself has already suffered these things, and far worse as well. He's fully able to sympathize with us. And there's encouragement, furthermore, in knowing that his death, as we saw this morning wonderfully in those words from Isaiah 53, his death has paid fully and forever the price for our sin.

It's left us free from the condemnation that otherwise we would be liable to. And there's encouragement in knowing that Christ is now risen. It shows the sufficiency of his death, the reality of his claims, the availability of eternal life to mankind.

There's encouragement in Christ in knowing that he is now exalted. He is now ruling from his throne in heaven. And there's encouragement in knowing that he will one day return to bring salvation to everyone who is waiting for him.

[5 : 37] There's much encouragement from being united to Christ. And then Paul asks, is there any comfort from his love? And what he means here is that the love that Christ has put in our hearts for one another.

And where that love exists between Christian believers, there is comfort as well, isn't there, as we support and we uphold and we care for one another in the church. I had a great conversation with one of your members this morning who's recently joined the church and speaks of the great comfort that she has received from the love of this fellowship of believers here.

There's great comfort from love. This is a blessing of fellowship. And then Paul asks, is there any common sharing in the spirit? Speaking about this idea of fellowship, as he calls it elsewhere.

It's in the spirit. The Holy Spirit has been poured into the heart of each and every believer, bringing us together in fellowship with one another, regardless of our age or color or class. All of us as believers, filled with the spirit.

And the spirit in us brings about this sense of fellowship, this common sharing with one another on every level, spiritually as well as practically as well. This sense of belonging, this sense of being related to one another that exists between believers.

[6 : 52] And then Paul says, is there any tenderness, any compassion in the church? And of course, yes, there is. As a result of that fellowship that we share in the spirit, our hearts are warmed towards one another.

Meaning that the natural outflow of that is affection, sympathy, tenderness and kindness to those who are in the church. You see what Paul is doing here. He's writing to these believers.

They're really going through the mill. It's difficult times for them. He's just spoken in that previous paragraph about many of the things that they are facing as believers. The opposition from the world around, the persecution, the conflict that they're engaged in.

And now at the start of chapter two, he points them to some of the blessings that they get as a result of being in the church. As if to say to them, don't you see that this is what you need, Christian person?

If you're a Christian, you need the church family around you to keep you going in life. If you like, the Apostle Paul is dangling these blessings of fellowship before the eyes of the Philippian church, like a carrot before their eyes, saying to them, this is the help, this is the support that you desperately need if you're going to keep going as a Christian.

[8 : 00] These are the blessings of fellowship that there are for you in the church. If you're going through a difficult time in life as well, then I want to dangle those blessings of fellowship before you as well again this evening, like a carrot before your eyes, and show you from this passage all the blessings that are found from being amongst the people of God.

The encouragement that there is in Christ, the comfort, the love, that sense of genuine fellowship with one another, the tenderness, the compassion. Going to church isn't something you've got to do.

Going to church is something you get to do as a believer. And as we meet together like this, we feel that fellowship spurring one another on in the Christian life. There are many blessings of fellowship. And then very suddenly, Paul says, right, well that's enough time on this floor of the building. You only get one verse here. We need to move on. There's much more for us to see. And so we all pile back into this lift.

Remember we're on the top floor. So we're going to head down now. We're going to go to the next floor, down the middle floor. Paul presses the button. We descend one floor to the middle floor. And as we open the doors and step out, Paul says to us, this floor, this floor is the one on which the top floor rests.

[9 : 12] This floor is called the unity of the church. We read about this in verse two. He says to them, You see those wonderful blessings of fellowship that we read about in verse one.

Rest upon the church being united with one another. That's why Paul follows verse one with verse two, which is this repeated plea for unity in the church.

And he calls on them to complete his joy by having the same mind and the same love as one another. See, when Paul speaks about them having the same mind, he's speaking about the fact that Christian believers are united around the truths that they believe in.

What's in their mind is the same. It doesn't mean we agree on absolutely everything, but it does mean we do agree on the things of first importance, Christ and who he is and what he has done for us.

And when he speaks of the same love, he's talking about their hearts cherishing the same things. You see, a united church, according to Paul, is one which is united both in their heads and in their hearts as well.

[10 : 26] And as a result of that unity that they share with one another, they're able to enjoy all those blessings of fellowship that he's already described to us in verse one, the top floor of the building.

So as we look around this middle level of the building, it's very impressive to us, isn't it? It's incredible to see people from many different backgrounds, many different walks of life, all so united with one another, enjoying such a chord with one another, having the same mind and the same love as well.

And so we turn to Paul, who's giving us this tour of the building, and we say to him, how does the church arrive at this sense of unity when at the same time there's so much diversity within the church?

And Paul says to us, well, I need you to see the ground level next for you to understand that. And so we all get back into the lift once again, and Paul presses the button, and we head down one further floor.

So we're now at ground level. It's the lowest thing visible. And this floor carries the weight of the two above it. In other words, it supports both the unity of the church and the blessings of fellowship that the church can enjoy.

[11 : 36] And as the doors open and we step out, Paul says this floor is called the humility of the individual Christian. The humility of the individual Christian. We read about this in verses 3 and 4.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others.

See, what does the humility of the individual Christian look like? Well, first of all, it involves repenting of selfish ambition. Ask yourself, is there any selfish ambition you need to repent of? Have your motives about serving in the church maybe been coloured perhaps by an agenda of self-advancement? Have you become conceited in the way that you serve?

Paul says do nothing out of selfish ambition. Do you see the problem? If we allow selfish ambitions to creep into our minds on this, the ground floor, then the church can no longer be united on the middle floor, which in turn stems the flow of those blessings that we saw on the top floor.

[12 : 46] I want you to see from these verses that what even one person says or does or even thinks in the life of a Christian congregation will affect the whole of the body. We are a body. We're connected with one another.

When one part aches, the whole body aches. When one part sins, everyone is affected. Paul says do nothing out of selfish ambition. As long as someone holds to that attitude of self-advancement and selfish ambition, obviously the church can never be of one mind because no one else in the church is thinking about their advancement.

Obviously, they're not thinking that. And therefore, such a person is not only detracting from the unity that the church enjoys, but also detracting from the blessings of fellowship that the church can enjoy as well.

And instead, what are we to do? Well, Paul says, In humility, value others more highly than ourselves. In other words, stop looking to our own interests. Start looking to the interests of others. Instead of looking inward at ourselves, the humble heart that Paul is describing here is one which looks outwards to others and to their interests and starts serving those interests.

[13:55] So the humble heart is one which turns up at church on a Sunday and looks around the room and asks, Is there anyone here who needs encouragement in Christ? Anyone here who needs to really feel the comfort of love?

Anyone here who needs to feel a sense of the warmth of spirit-filled fellowship? Anyone here who needs to receive tenderness and compassion? And you see that as you think about doing those things and as you start serving people in that manner, you and the other believers that you're serving in that way are suddenly back on the top floor again, aren't you?

You're at verse 1, enjoying all those blessings of fellowship that the Christian can enjoy. You see the way that the first half of the passage fits together. the blessings of fellowship brought about through the unity of the church, which is supported by the humility of the individual Christian.

So you turn to Paul and you say, Well, thank you, Paul. In just these four short verses, you've given us this whistle-stop tour of the life of a Christian congregation. You've shown us that the ground floor of our own individual humility will bring about the unity of the church, which will in turn bring about the blessings that we can enjoy in our fellowship with one another.

But then you think that you spot some kind of structural weakness in this building. So you turn to Paul and you say to him, But isn't this all a bit idealistic?

[15:21] You say to him, Every member of every church is a sinner. And therefore, How on earth can you build this whole edifice upon the idea that every single individual believer is going to have this humble, this servant-hearted attitude towards others?

You say to Paul, Isn't that a major structural weakness in the body of the church? And Paul, he smiles back at you and he says, Well, I was hoping you were going to ask me that question. There's a reason why I didn't spend very long at all showing you these three flaws. Because there's something else I want to show you. And spend much longer showing you that. And he says, You need to get back in the lift one more time because I still need to show you the foundations. And so we get back into the lift with Paul and he presses the button and we start descending. And we keep descending. And we keep on descending. And we're thinking to ourselves, How deep are these foundations?

And eventually, eventually, the lift comes to a halt. And the doors open. And as you step out, Paul says to you, Let me show you the foundation of the church.

[16:26] Let me show you what the whole edifice of the church is built upon and upheld by. Let me show you Christ. We're going to spend the rest of our time just looking at Christ.

And Paul has got so much to say about him. First of all, look at the start of verse 6. He says, Who, being in very nature God. See, Paul starts with that pre-incarnate state of Christ.

In other words, what Christ was like before he took a human body and a human nature. And he says, Before his incarnation, he was in the very nature God.

And that word for nature is a very strong word. It can be defined as displaying outwardly as well as possessing inwardly. And Paul is saying, Before the incarnation, Christ was God.

In every way, He possessed divinity inwardly and he displayed it gloriously outwardly as well. Christ is God, full stop. And even if we spent forever trying to search out what it means to be in the nature God, we would never get to the end of it.

[17:27] We never will get to the end of it. Christ is eternal. He is uncreated. He is perfectly holy. He is unimaginably glorious. He had everything going for him. And yet look at the end of verse 6.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. What did the pre-incarnate Christ do with this equality with God that he's always

possessed for all eternity?

Well, he didn't consider it something to be used for his own self-centered advancement, did he? In other words, he didn't try and cash in on his status and use it for selfish gain.

We might say he did nothing out of selfish ambition. And what did he do? Well, he made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant being born in human likeness. Now, don't misunderstand Paul here.

When he says that Christ made himself nothing, he doesn't mean that he stopped being God. It's impossible for God to stop being God. John Calvin is very helpful on that verse.

[18 : 29] He says, And therefore, Christ took to himself something he didn't previously have.

That is, he took to himself a real human nature, a real human body. And so now you see he has two natures, a divine one and a human one. But his outward appearance was in the form of humanity. And he was born in a perfectly normal way. Obviously, the conception was far from ordinary, but the birth itself was perfectly straightforward. And he looked just like the rest of us.

We briefly looked at those words in Isaiah 53 this morning, didn't we? There was nothing about his appearance that would draw us to him. He was a very ordinary looking guy. Imagine that.

The eternal God, the one who flung the stars into space. The one from whom the angels hid their faces. Such was the magnificence of his glory. Here on earth, just looking like Job Loggs.

[19 : 33] That's the wonder of the incarnation. God incomprehensibly became man. Here is the servant of mankind. He came not to be served, but he came to serve.

And how did he do that? Verse 8. Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. You see, through unspeakable humility, he fulfilled the responsibility of man towards God.

That is being obedient to God. He was tempted in every way that you and I are tempted, and yet without sin. And he fulfilled the law of God that we have failed to fulfill. He did it perfectly.

The only perfect life there has ever been. The only perfect life there will ever be. And he lived that obedient life as an act of service for mankind.

Doing it in our place and for our benefit. And then in the end, this life of humble obedience, this life of service took him to the place of ultimate humiliation, ultimate service, and ultimate sacrifice, where he was obedient even to the point of death on a cross.

[20 : 37] And as he hung there, taking upon himself the penalty that our rejection of God deserves, paying for it in our place, dying for us so that we might live.

Dying as the greatest act of humble service that the universe will ever see. And I look back at verse 5. We skipped over it a moment ago.

Paul says, In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. So to return to the now exhausted illustration, you see that verse 5 is what fastens the ground floor into the foundations.

In other words, the humility of individual Christians. The humility of you and me as we seek to follow Christ. It comes through being fastened to Christ Jesus, united with him who is the foundation.

His great act of humility, his act of service for mankind, therefore being the blueprint, the example, the inspiration, and the ability as well to be humble servants ourselves.

[21 : 41] It's only possible if you're connected with Christ Jesus. Fastened to him as your foundation. Verse 5 tells us that. You're not going to do this on your own. You're not going to be the type of church member you're called to be.

If you're trying to do it in your own strength. This happens in and through Christ Jesus. As his spirit equips us and changes us to be more like him. Jesus says, apart from me, you can do nothing.

We need Christ for this. So the question for us is, what is it going to look like practically for you to have this mind of Christ? I wonder what you've got going for you.

What are the gifts that God has placed into your hands? What status do you enjoy? What are the abilities that God has furnished your life with? Some of you will have the gift of preaching.

Some will have the gift of leading. Others will have the gift of teaching or musical ability or administration or evangelism or hospitality or encouragement and so forth.

[22 : 38] Christ gives to every one of his believers gifts to serve the church with. And whatever gifts and abilities you might have for the well-being of the church.

The temptation will always be there to consider those things. An opportunity to be grasped. To be cashed in on. Something to be used for your own self-advancement in the church.

See, like Paul alludes to in verse 3. The temptation will be there to do these things. To use these gifts out of rivalry. Out of self-centeredness.

Out of selfish ambition. If you're anything like me, you know you can't spend five minutes using a gift in the church without feeling a wave of pride crashing in.

Have you felt that temptation whereby we love to be seen to be doing things really well in the church? I know that I have. Or perhaps seeing someone else with a more outwardly impressive gift than we have.

[23 : 34] And just feeling sick with jealousy about that person. Or what's even worse, seeing someone with the same gift that we have. And just thinking to ourselves, they don't do that half as well as I do.

What an un-Christ-like attitude that is. Do nothing out of rivalry, Paul says. And that's why it's so important. As we live alongside one another in the church, we keep on looking to Christ.

We keep on looking to his example. By becoming a servant of others. Not doing anything out of selfish ambition. Not doing anything out of self-advancement or rivalry.

But instead, humbly looking to the interests of others. And serving them, even at great cost to ourselves. Everything that we do as we serve in the church should therefore be modelled upon what Christ has already done for us.

This is a great act of humble service for others. And yet still, there's much more that Paul wants to show us of Christ. His obedience to death was the bottom, the end of his humiliation.

[24 : 35] And that it was followed by his exaltation. And so having told us already about that humiliation in verses 6 to 8. Paul finishes by telling us about the exaltation of Christ. Christ didn't stay dead.

God raised him from the grave. God exalted him and placed him on the throne. At his right hand side. From where Christ is now. Sat there as the ruler of the universe.

And therefore, Paul says before him, every knee should bow. Every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. To the glory of God the Father. That's how the story ends.

Glorious, isn't it? That the one who voluntarily was humiliated. Is now exalted. And in his humiliated state, he had no form or majesty that we should desire him.

No beauty that we should look at him. And yet now in his exalted state, he is arrayed in splendour and glory. In his humiliated state, he was one from whom men hid their faces and despised him and esteemed him not.

[25 : 34] But now, now in his exalted state, he is awaiting the day when every tongue will call him Lord. In his humiliated state, he became the very epitome of servanthood.

And in his exalted state, one day every knee will bow before him. If you've come along this evening and you're not a Christian, I want to invite you in your heart to do that now. To bow before this Lord Jesus.

To call him Lord yourself. Eventually, everyone will do that. Every tongue must call him Lord. And it makes an eternity of difference if you do so now, before he returns in judgment.

And you've heard this evening about the kind of Lord that he is. A Lord who is gracious and compassionate to his people. A Lord who has drawn near to his people in order to serve us.

He's even died for us. And now he is raised and he's on the throne. And he rules the universe. Isn't that the kind of Lord that you would want? And the invitation is there for you.

[26 : 33] And I invite you to come to him and call him your Lord. And for those of us who are Christians, as we read these verses 9, 10 and 11, I want you to be encouraged that in God's economy, exaltation follows humiliation.

As we saw this morning, Jesus says, Whoever exalts himself will be humbled. But whoever humbles himself will be exalted. And we can be assured of that because of the resurrection and the exaltation of Jesus, which is the prototype of our own resurrection, our own exaltation in the end.

Just as we're to become like Christ through a life of humble obedience and humble service. One day, God has promised us he will raise us, he will exalt us, he will glorify us.

Just as Christ now is. The church I work at in London, we have an industrial sized photocopier, which photocopies all the service sheets for the Sunday services.

Now for obvious reasons, you don't want to photocopy 400 service sheets and realise that all the pages are in the wrong order. There's a very clever little button on that photocopier.

[27 : 42] And you press it, and it does just the first one on its own, individually. That means that obviously you can check it, make sure it's all okay. And then you give the go-ahead, and the other 399 will come out exactly like that first one.

You see that first one is there to demonstrate in advance what the rest will look like in the end, when you give the go-ahead. And when God raised Jesus from the grave and welcomed him to glory, he did a similar thing.

He raised him from the dead, demonstrating to everyone in Christ Jesus that when he gives the go-ahead, we also, those of us who are in him, will also be raised from the dead, and we will be glorified and be exalted with Christ.

What does Paul say? When we see him, we will be like him. We will be exactly like him.

Transformed into our glorified state as he is now glorified.

That first resurrection 2,000 years ago demonstrates in advance what the rest of us will end up like on the last day when God gives the go-ahead. We'll be resurrected. We'll be glorified.

[28 : 49] If you've got a Bible there, just look over at verses 10 and 11 of chapter 3, where Paul makes that connection. He says that now we become like Jesus in his death. That is, now we follow that path of humble obedience, that path of serving others at great cost to ourselves.

And so, verse 11, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. That is, after the life of humble obedience, being assured of reaching glory where Christ now is.

And therefore, as a Christian, as you read verses 9, 10 and 11, it should be a huge encouragement to you as you do the difficult, hard yards of Christian service now. You see, God has called us to be like Christ in his humble and self-giving service to others, which is seen most explicitly in his death. And yet that's only half the picture, isn't it? Because God has also promised that in the end, we will be like Christ in his resurrection and his exaltation as well. We follow him now into a life of humble service of others.

And one day we'll follow him into glory as well. That's how the story ends. That gives you great incentive, doesn't it? To keep on going in the Christian life, to keep on following the Lord Jesus through a life of humble service towards others, knowing that the end of that road is being with the risen, the exalted Lord in glory.

[30 : 11] Let's pray together. Our Father, we want to give you our praise for the Lord Jesus, who is the very epitome of servanthood, having voluntarily laid aside his outer glory and stepped down into this broken world, not to be served, but to serve us by giving his life up for us.

And Father, would you help us to follow him in this by becoming servants of others, living a life of humble obedience before you so that the church can be united and can enjoy all the blessings of fellowship in whatever we might face.

And Father, we also thank you for the glorious future that awaits us when, at his return, we will be raised as Christ now is and we will be welcomed to glory. And Father, we pray that you would encourage us with these things and we pray them all in the strong and the glorious name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. Now to him who is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy, to the only God, our Saviour, be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ, our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore.

Amen. Let's close by sharing the grace with one another. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore.

[31 : 45] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.