

Calum Cameron: Phillipians 2 - Ultimate Humility

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] So we're now just for a few minutes going to turn and look at some of these words in Philippians chapter 2. So if you have a Bible you may want to have it open there. We're continuing our short series through the book of Philippians.

The first Sunday I was here we looked at the opening verses, particularly verse 6, and the confidence and assurance that Christians have for the future, that he who begins a good work in us will see it through to completion at the day of Christ.

Then last Sunday evening we looked at the advance of the Gospel. We looked at the progress that the Gospel makes. Now this evening we're moving on into chapter 2 where we find Jesus Christ's example of humility.

I think we tend to learn things best by example. I think if we are shown how to do something it's for me anyway the most effective way to learn.

I remember some years ago trying to teach my mother how to use the computer properly and I would explain to her in perfect detail every step of what she needed to do. I'd write out for her so every time she's using the computer she can look at this and know what to do.

[1 : 15] But without fail she would call me through and I would have to sit down with her and show her exactly what to do step by step. She needed to be shown and in a similar way I think if you told me tomorrow morning to go out and round up some sheep, if you gave me specific instructions, if you wrote down everything I needed to do, I would be utterly hopeless.

It's the kind of thing you have to be shown how to do. If you ever watched Blue Peter you might remember that in part of the show they would have a section where they would make things.

They would either do arts and crafts or they would show you how to make a certain kind of food. And they would talk you through each step. They would say here's how you do this and then they would bring out one they did earlier.

They would set it out as an example. And that part is usually pretty demoralising for me because I look at mine and realise that it looks nothing like theirs. But the idea of having something like that I think is important.

The point I'm trying to make is that we learn best when we are shown how to do something. We are given a clear example of what to do. And I think that's what's happening here in Philippians chapter 2.

[2 : 28] I think we are being given a clear example of how to live. The mind of Christ that Paul speaks about in verse 5, the attitude of Christ, the thinking of Christ, he is laying out as an example for Christians.

He's laying out here as something to transform our lives. It's place here in God's word to show us, to teach us how to live. Now we need to remember that Paul is writing to a church that was facing extremely common problems.

It was facing division, disagreements. There had been a clear lack of humility in the way that these people were interacting. And these are all problems that are common to the church.

It's not specific to the Philippians. These are symptoms of human sinfulness. They are problems that every congregation will face from time to time.

I think as human beings we have a huge capacity to be self-centred. We have the ability to be hurtful. We have the ability to be proud and in vain.

[3 : 36] Paul's response here is not to go off on one. He doesn't get angry with these Philippians. He doesn't shout at them and tell them how stupid they've been. Look at what his response is.

He points them to Jesus. He points them to the greatest example of humility, the greatest illustration of self-denial that the world has ever seen.

That's what I want us to focus in on this evening. This is a great example from Jesus of true humility. I also want to mention that this section is one of the most deep, one of the most profound and theologically saturated sections of Scripture there is.

It's so deep. I think we can only begin to scratch the surface of Philippians 2. We're going to do it by asking three questions. First of all, what did Jesus do?

Secondly, what did God do? Thirdly, and finally, what should we do? First of all, what did Jesus do? If I can get it on the screen.

[4 : 44] The first thing we're told is that although Jesus was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He did not consider his position a thing to be held on to.

See, I think the extent to which Jesus humbled himself, the extent of his humility, we can only fully understand when we think about the position he was in, when we think about who he was.

Remember how John begins his Gospel? He says, in the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through him, and without him was not a thing that was made. See, Jesus is the Word of God. He is the divine Logos, the eternal Son through whom God created all things.

So he was in a position of eternal glory and majesty. Lots of people today think Jesus was just an inspiring human, that he was just some outcast who rallied to the needs of the poor, that he was just some good man who inspires us to social justice.

[6 : 00] Some people say, yeah, Jesus was a great teacher, but he wasn't God. But I don't think we can appreciate the extent of his humility until we appreciate properly his divine status.

Paul is saying here that Jesus was the form of God himself. He was the visible manifestation of everything that God is. If you look at him, you have seen God.

John Calvin put it like this. He said that from all eternity, he was the visible expression of God's glory. Colossians chapter 1 says that the Son is the image of the invisible God.

So Jesus, by rights, should have considered equality with God a thing to be grasped. By rights, he should have considered that something to be held on to. By rights, Jesus should have continued to enjoy the safety and the comfort and the glory of heaven.

The point Paul is making here is that Jesus did not insist on those rights. He chose to forfeit them. He chose to bring himself so unbelievably low.

[7 : 12] Now I want to get inside the heads of the Philippians for a second. Think about the context that Paul is writing to. This is a culture that values status. It's a culture that values honour and prestige and power above everything else.

So it would have been inconceivable to these Philippians that a God would not consider glory, would not consider power and all these things something to be held on to, something to be grasped.

The word Paul uses for grasp, it's a strange word, but it seems to have a sense of selfish gain, of advantage attached to it.

And remember he's writing at a time when people would actually expect their gods to do this. They would expect their gods to use their divine powers for self-advantage.

See the Greek gods are fascinating when you read about them. Some of them are really weird. Artemis, the goddess, was known for her temper.

[8 : 14] And if she lost her temper and she became angry, she would set her dogs on people and they would rip them apart. It was also believed that Zeus and Hermes, they came to visit a town, and in the town only one couple showed them hospitality, so they sent a flood that destroyed the whole town.

But here we are told that Jesus did not consider his position, his power, his glory, something to be grasped, something to be guarded. He did not insist on those rights.

You hear a lot today about individual rights. It's become almost the battle cry of a generation. Nothing must infringe on individual rights. The things that each one of us are entitled to as human beings.

Now I think a lot of these rights are good things. Fundamental human rights like the right to life, the right to freedom, the right to free speech, the right to education.

All these things are great and wonderful. But so often we extend our rights to things like our own happiness, our own pleasure, our own gratification, all of these things.

[9 : 24] See, Jesus was completely entitled by rights to remain in his position of glory, to remain in heaven. But Paul is saying he did not consider that something to be grasped.

So what did he do? Well, Paul tells us that instead of holding on to that position, he emptied himself. Jesus took the form of a servant. He was born in the likeness of humanity.

See, this is describing for us the most incredible, the most astonishing transformation in all of human history. Jesus Christ, the eternal divine Son of God, in all of that glory and all of that majesty, stooped this low.

If you know the authorized version, you'll remember that it says there that he made himself of no reputation. He made himself nothing. It's overwhelming to think about.

Jesus Christ emptied himself. So what does this mean? Well, it's important first to understand that it doesn't mean that he stopped being God.

[10 : 32] It doesn't mean that Jesus Christ emptied himself of his divine nature. Paul goes on to make this clear. He explains this with two statements. First, he took the form of a servant.

Again, getting inside the heads of these Philippians, it wouldn't have been too strange for them to think about a God taking on human form. The Greeks believed that lots of their gods did this.

However, to hear that Jesus had chosen to take the form of a servant of what's closer to a slave, in a society that was so driven by honor, so driven by status and prestige, it was inconceivable that a God would do that.

But this is exactly what Jesus did. Paul writes elsewhere in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 9. He says that though Jesus Christ was rich, for your sakes he became poor.

It's astonishing. By rights, Jesus could have taken the form of a great king. Jesus could have come to this earth in a full blaze of glory with divine power.

[11 : 43] He could have come to this earth in a way that each one of us would instantly have bowed the knee. He could have come in a way that made clear to everyone exactly who he was.

But he came. He made himself nothing. He took the form of a servant. Now a lot of the problems that Paul addresses in his letter, it's to do with people who were overly concerned with their own image, with their own reputation, with what other people thought of them.

People who were anxious to be recognized as people of consequence, people who were important. Donald MacLeod says this. He said that by contrast, the one person who really was somebody, put himself in a position where people completely misunderstood him.

He says they looked at him and saw nothing but a man. There was nothing in his appearance to distinguish him from anyone else. In contrast with a lot of the images we get at Christmastime, there was no halo, there was no divine glow emanating from Jesus.

Remember that passage we read last Sunday morning from Isaiah 53? He had no beauty, he had no majesty to attract us to him. He had nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

[13 : 05] Now when Paul says that Jesus took on human likeness, he's not saying he doesn't mean that Jesus just appeared to be human. He doesn't mean that it was some illusion.

Jesus' humanity was 100% authentic. Hebrews chapter 2 reminds us of this. It says that he shared in our humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death.

Hebrews goes on and it says, for this reason he had to be made like us, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest.

Think about the utter humility it took Jesus to do that, to embrace full humanity, to become just like us except without sin.

See, before the incarnation Jesus felt no pain. Jesus as the Son of God didn't experience shame. He didn't experience humiliation. He wasn't limited by things like tiredness.

[14 : 06] On Thursday night we were thinking about Jesus being our great high priest who experienced the full range of human emotion. He felt what it was like to be misunderstood.

He felt what it was like to be tired and weary. He felt what it was like to have burdens and anxieties. He felt temptations. He knew what it was like to lose a loved one.

He wept. The point Paul is making is that the eternal divine Son of God humiliated himself by coming down and experiencing our life with our pain, our grief, our sorrow.

So Paul is saying if you want to see humility, if you want an example of what that looks like, if you want a clear picture of that, look at Jesus. Look at what he did for you.

He emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in human likeness. Thirdly we are told that he humbled himself.

[15 : 09] Being found in human form, Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. I think the word cross has perhaps lost its edge slightly for us in the 21st century.

See it's a word that when Paul said this would have sent shivers down their spines. The first century poet Cicero said this. He said that the very name of the cross should be far away not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears.

The cross was the sort of thing you wouldn't speak about in a decent company. It was the most humiliating and excruciating way to die.

But the real test of Jesus' obedience, the real test of his humility, was that he willingly chose to experience everything that the cross entailed. It wasn't just that it was going to be painful.

It wasn't just that it was going to be embarrassing and humiliating. It was that Jesus chose to experience the spiritual anguish of the cross.

[16 : 19] One writer put it like this. He said that the cross for Jesus was death in its most aggravated form. Not merely because of the indescribable physical pain, but because in Jesus' case it was the occasion, it was the instrument, it was the symbol of the curse of sin.

So Jesus experienced that death unmitigated and unqualified. Death with the sting. A death without light. A death without comfort, without encouragement.

Donald MacLeod said, the long journey for Jesus to Calvary was a journey into a black hole. A black hole involving not only physical and emotional pain and humiliation, but a spiritual desertion beyond our imagining.

In his agony, he would cry out and not be heard. He would lose all sense of divine sonship. He would lose all sense of his father's love. Into that tiny space, into his body on the cross, and into that fraction of time, God gathered the sin off the world, and there in the flesh of his own son, he condemned it.

It is incredible for us to think about that. It's astounding. It's astonishing to think that the Father treated the Son as if he was a rebel.

[17 : 45] As if Jesus had been disobedient. As if Jesus had rejected God. As if Jesus had lived like you and I have. In his humble obedience, Jesus took that.

He took the ultimate humiliation and shame. Something that by rights should have been meant for us. And Jesus was utterly willing to do that.

Not only willing to empty himself, not only willing to lay aside his divine glory, not only willing to take the lowly, unassuming position of a servant, but Jesus was utterly obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

You see, the cross, I think, is at the same time the most devastating and beautiful climax of Jesus Christ's humility. I think even as we consider this, as we think about all that Jesus did, all that Jesus gave up, all that Jesus went through, I think we are challenged to examine our own hearts.

You see, sometimes what others think of us can be the driving factor in our lives. We get so caught up with our own reputation, with our own glory.

[19 : 00] We do our best to avoid shame, to avoid humiliation. We sometimes act as if certain people or certain tasks are beneath us.

Jesus is one who didn't insist on his rights. Jesus is one who emptied himself, who humbled himself, who was utterly obedient to the point of death.

St. Augustine was asked once about the central principles of the Christian life. He answered this, he said, first, humility.

Second, humility. Third, humility. Now, as we move on in the passage, we are going to ask what did God do?

We see a major transition now in this short section. See, in verse 6 to 8 that we have been looking at, Jesus is the subject of all the verbs. It's drawing attention to what he's been doing, what he did.

[19 : 57] He did not account equality with God, a thing to be grasped. He emptied himself, he humbled himself. Now, as we move into verse 9, we see that God becomes the main subject. There's a shift in the focus.

So our question now is, what did God do? Well, we're told here, my clicker's not working.

Oh well. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name. See, what appeared to be utter defeat and humiliation and failure for Jesus actually resulted in God raising him to the highest position of glory, of majesty.

To the position he was in before he came down, but now revealed to all. In Revelation chapters 4 and 5, John is speaking a bit about this. He gives us this wonderful imagery into this.

He describes Jesus at the centre of the throne of God, crowned with glory and honour. Paul says here that God has given Jesus the name that is above every name.

[21 : 10] He's making it even clearer that Jesus is Yahweh. Jesus is God in the flesh. Jesus is a representation of God's glory.

See, the Old Testament, it constantly reminds us that the name above all names is Yahweh. Isaiah 42 verse 8 says, I am the Lord, I am Yahweh.

That is my name, my glory. I give that to no other. So if you ever need a passage that points to Jesus' divinity, to the fact that he is God, you need to come to Philippians chapter 2.

It's interesting, if you go all the way back to Genesis, to the Tower of Babel, we find there people trying to make a great name for themselves. We see straight after that, in his grace, God makes promises to human beings.

He says to Abraham and later to David, he says, I will make a great name for you. And these are promises that we see partially fulfilled in the Old Testament, but they only find their ultimate fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

[22 : 16] God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name. As human beings, we are constantly trying to make our own names great.

I think the human heart has this huge capacity to exalt itself. We want other people to see how great we are. We were thinking about this last Sunday morning with Adonijah in First Kings.

Adonijah, we're told, exalted himself. He put himself forward. He said, I will be king. I think that's a constant temptation for us as human beings.

It is incredible. It is phenomenal to think that through all of Jesus' humiliation, through all of his shame, God purposed and God planned to exalt him above everything.

For God the Father, exalting Jesus meant giving him the greatest name. It meant giving him the highest position in the universe.

[23 : 15] And Paul goes on in verse 10 to highlight the purpose in doing that. He says here, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

See, in the Roman world, bowing the knee is a display of submission. It's recognizing that that person is of greater authority, greater status, greater glory than ourselves.

But in the Bible, it refers most commonly to God himself. If we think again to the prophecy of Isaiah, God says there, Before me, every knee will bow. By me, every tongue will confess.

And Paul would have been aware of that. Paul would have been aware of these Old Testament prophecies. He was a Pharisee who knew his Old Testament inside out. So the point he's making is becoming clearer and clearer. Jesus Christ is Yahweh. Jesus Christ is Lord.

And Paul is saying that one day every person will acknowledge that. Every single one of us will bow the knee, whether we like it or not. In heaven and on earth and under the earth, that's just a phrase that's another way of saying everything.

[24 : 30] It's a whole picture. The clear point that Paul's making is that all of creation will one day recognize that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And I think in a world that just seems so full of chaos, in a world that feels full of turmoil, we see terrible things happening on a regular basis.

We think even recently of the attacks in London. Sometimes it seems like our world is out of control. We can be assured that God has promised us in His word that one day even terrorists will bow the knee.

And every person will recognize, the entire created universe will recognize the power and the authority of God in Christ Jesus. In verse 11, Paul goes on and says, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And what that essentially means that along with that total submission, there will be an open acknowledgement that God alone is God. And Paul again sees us as fulfilling what's promised in the Old Testament.

[25 : 40] See, to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, this became the central confession of the early church. It was what marked them out. One writer said this, it summarizes four key convictions.

It means that Jesus was the promised Old Testament Messiah who delivers His people from their sins. It means that Jesus was Yahweh, the creator and covenant Lord of Israel in the flesh.

Third, it means that the exalted Jesus Christ alone is the true Lord and ruler of this universe. And then fourthly, as the true Lord, Jesus Christ deserves and demands total allegiance.

And I think while that is a great source of confidence and assurance for Christians, I think for those who don't confess Jesus as Lord, for those who don't currently bow the knee in humble submission, I think it's quite a terrifying prospect.

See, there's an implicit warning in Paul's words. He's saying, even if you don't confess now that Jesus is Lord, you will one day. But on that day, it will be too late.

[26 : 50] You will have no choice but to bow the knee. You will have no option but to confess that Jesus is Lord. But that says he returns as judge.

I think it's not easy for us as human beings to bow the knee. It's not easy for us to confess before other people that Jesus is Lord. It's not easy for us to hold up our hands and say that Jesus Christ is Lord of my heart, Lord of my life.

But the Bible is so clear that one day, every knee will bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And then finally we see in verse 11 that the ultimate result of that is the glory of God the Father.

Thirdly, we're going to ask the question, what should we do? And I think the simple answer to that in this passage is that we need to be more like Jesus.

Verse 5, Paul says this, he says, have this mind among yourselves. And what mind is he talking about? The one displayed by Christ, the one modelled for us by Jesus.

[27 : 58] As Christians, as God's people, we are called to imitate that example. We are to strive to desire to be more and more and more like him.

And I think that's why Paul has placed this huge profound doctrine right here. He's put it in the context of Christian living.

You might remember a few weeks ago I mentioned something called the imperative indicative. And really that just means you have a statement and a command. It's saying something that's true, it's highlighting what is.

And it's telling you here's how you should live in light of that. So essentially what's happening is Paul is saying look at what God has done in Jesus Christ. Therefore, this is how you should live.

I think we need to be clear on that, that the idea of being more like Jesus or following his example is not the Gospel. Paul is not saying if you do that well enough, if you're humble enough, if you're obedient enough, then you'll be saved. He's not saying that.

[29 : 06] That's not how we are made right with God. The Gospel is so clear that it's not about our own efforts. It's not about getting ourselves to a certain standard of living.

And praise God that it isn't. But there's a clear responsibility laid on us for those of us who have come to know God, for those of us who have believed the Gospel.

There's a responsibility in how we live that we need to respond in obedience, in humility. The church that Paul was writing to here was full of people who were focused on themselves.

Full of people who weren't overly concerned with unity. People who were self-important. People who were prideful. People who insisted on their own rights above those of others.

And all of these things, I think, are symptoms of our sinful hearts. In the church, there will always be people we don't get on with. There will be people who we find difficult.

[30 : 08] I remember at the General Assembly a few weeks ago, I can't remember who said it, but someone said that the church is not a museum for saints. The church is a hospital for sinners.

And of course, that reality means that there will be times when unity is difficult. There will be times when relationships feel strained. There will be times when we find humility and patience difficult.

So what do we do? Well, Paul says, look at Jesus. I think that's why this hugely meaty theological doctrine is here. It's not so we can fill our minds with more information.

It's to help us know how to live. I like to look at Philippians 2 as a sort of theological sandwich. In the middle, in verse 6 to 11, we have the meat in this profound Christology.

These verses about who Jesus is, what he has done. But on each side, it is almost sandwiched by life application. In verse 3 to 5 and verse 12 onwards.

[31 : 17] Paul says in verse 3, do nothing from selfish ambition, do nothing from conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

And what does that look like? Well, Paul says, look at Jesus. Look at his example. I think there are so many implications for the way we live today.

How often do we find ourselves in a conversation steering it towards our own interests? How often do we find ourselves really thinking about the person in front of us as more significant?

How do we respond to people that we find difficult? How do we cope with our own pride and our own self-interest?

See, humility, true humility doesn't mean that we need to look down on ourselves. It doesn't mean that we need to be miserable. It doesn't mean that we need to think that we are worthless. Someone once said that humility is not thinking less of yourself.

[32 : 24] It's thinking of yourself less. And true Christ-like humility will do that. It will radically change our sense of priority. See, in John chapter 13, when Jesus washes the disciples feet, this is a task that was reserved for the lowest of the low.

He says in verse 12, Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. But now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. So just as we conclude and draw things together, we've looked at this passage with three questions.

First of all, what did Jesus do? He utterly humbled himself. He brought himself so incredibly low. Secondly, what did God do?

He highly exalted Jesus. He raised him to the highest position in the universe, the name that is above all names. So what should we do? Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

[33 : 35] We have to follow that example. Follow the one who gave up his rights, the one who emptied himself, the one who humbled himself by becoming obedient all the way to the cross.

And if you haven't yet done so, bow the knee, confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord. For one day every knee will bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

To the glory of God the Father. Amen.