

The Mind of Christ: A Resurrection Reflection

Philippians 2:5-11, 3:7-11

April 9, 2023

Introduction

Christ is risen! <congregation replies> He is risen indeed!

Many churches this morning will be hearing about the glorious empty tomb. They will be presented with sermons that will speak of the factuality of the physical resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Some will be shown the clear and consistent testimony of the accounts found in each Gospel showing the circumstances of Jesus death, burial, and resurrection. Many preachers this morning are heralding confidence that the Bible is truthful and accurate. Some will be challenging their hearers to belief that the Gospel is true, indeed the only hope for mankind and the world. We are in solidarity with them this morning. Indeed, the Bible is clear and presents a factual account of the bodily resurrection of Jesus from being dead.

Some churches will be hearing about the resurrection of Christ in their hearts and lives. They will hear of the power of resurrection living that should empower and motivate their thoughts and actions. And yet, some preachers this morning will call their audiences to believe this so much that they don't care whether Jesus's body is in some state of decomposition still in some Middle Eastern grave. They don't "need" to believe in some physical miracle that is barely believable in our day and age. But they still want to challenge their hearers that the "resurrection" has meaning for now as they navigate the complexities of living in the 21st century. While we confidently do not agree with those preachers about physicality of the resurrection (Christ is risen... <congregation replies> "He is risen indeed!") we do agree about the contemporary implications of Christ's resurrection in our thoughts and actions. So, in some sense we will be leaning into both conversations this morning.

We are going back into the book of Philippians to extract some of these implications this morning. You can find your way to Paul's letter to the Philippians in your copy of the Scriptures. To see a more detailed explanation of these passages, please refer to Pastor Russ's sermons on these. I want to revisit verses 5-11 of chapter 2 this morning and follow through to their implications in what Paul says in verse 7-11 of chapter 3. When we preach through a larger section of Scripture, an Old Testament book or a Gospel or Epistle in the New Testament, we can often lose seeing the forest because of all the trees in the way. Each individual story and paragraph have much to see and think about. Each sermon then often focuses on the main point of the individual text selected for that moment, and we try to keep the connections present but still, the main emphasis of the passage often does not get translated well to the rest of the larger book. I am going to tie up just a couple of loose ends this morning.

Let's begin with the first 4 verses of this section of this letter and read from verse 5 down through verse 8 and notice a description of Christ's humiliation.

Christ's Humiliation (Philippians 2:5-8)

*Have this mind among yourselves,
which is yours in Christ Jesus,*

*who, though he was in the form of God,
did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
but emptied himself,
by taking the form of a servant,
being born in the likeness of men.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.*

Humility's Purpose

Paul in this letter has segued into a discussion of the person and work of Christ on purpose. Their attitudes toward one another led him to this part of his overall argument in this letter. This allows us to see Christ's purpose and then put a particular practice into focus for the church at Philippi. This is how Paul's mind works and it doesn't surprise us that he wants his hearers to live in such a way that lives out the purpose, intent, and example of the gospel. He is working hard in this letter to provide protection and correction concerning how they should live together to exhibit the gospel, to display it both to one another and those unbelievers they live among. But as this section unfolds, I think we should be confronted with the fact that Paul is not merely asking them to be like Jesus, but to understand *how* they can be like Jesus in the first place. He wants them to have "this mind." By that he means "this way of thinking, this attitude" that leads to humility as he challenged them from the preceding paragraph. And as we often miss, this is a way of thinking as a group; collectively and interactionally. This way of thinking is connected to who and what Jesus was and did.

Humility's Process

In fact, this humble thinking is illustrated through process, a series of actions and events that were clearly demonstrated in the life of this Jesus of Nazareth. Here at Clearcreek Chapel, these events should still ring loud and clear from our recent sermon series through the Gospel of Matthew. In that Gospel, we saw how Jesus lived out the reality that Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, and the rest of the nation of Israel were by mere pictures. Paul here highlights Jesus' pre-existence with the Father and his incarnation, that is, the taking on of humanity in the process of a true and natural birth (even if the conception were supernatural). He alludes to his servanthood and, by implication, a perfect life that led him to a guilt-associated death on a cross. Paul rarely elaborates on Jesus' earthly ministry. That causes some scholars to believe Paul didn't care about the human person of Jesus. But when he does make mention of Jesus' life it is full of implications, and he views his ministry in a comprehensive manner. It is important to Paul's thinking that Jesus' death was the end of an intentional, illustrative, sacrificial, life with aspects that the Holy Spirit used other writers to flesh out in the texts of our four Gospels.

Humility's Product

And we cannot miss this last point, it is almost understated. There is a true "end product" that is going on in the narrative of the life of Jesus. The rest of Paul's body of writing, in fact most of the New Testament and especially the book of Hebrews which we will be working through with Pastor Russ in these next months on Sunday mornings, clearly show this cross-kind-of-death is sacrificial, taking on our guilt before the Father in payment for the death we deserve. It is not just that Jesus was so humble he allowed himself to be unjustly murdered, it was that he came intentionally to produce a salvation that is complete and assured. It is consistent with the Scriptures we know of as the Old Testament and leads us to a new way of living. Our humility in some sense can never be "like Jesus" but it is always "because of Jesus."

Let us move on in this passage and see the further implications then of Christ's work, now through the lens of his exaltation.

Christ's Exaltation (Philippians 2:9-11)

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

Exalted Resurrection

Here again we often miss a step as we read Paul's shorthand descriptions of God's work in Christ. Paul frequently will use a single word or phrase and intend his readers to fill out the rest of the details, particularly with respect to discussions about the Gospel. Often "death" or "resurrection" are used for a particular emphasis, but Paul has a robust, full orbbed understanding of the elements of the Gospel work of Jesus. And here he leans on "exaltation." This word makes the best counter to Jesus' humility that was just narrated. Indeed, however, this exaltation implies the continuing existence of the one who was just described as dead. Some try to make this only about the memory of Jesus that is exalted. Some try to claim that it is not important whether or not his body has decayed somewhere else, whether missed, stolen and became the product of a myth to rally worship and living concerning some ethical ideal. But it is the use of his given name "Jesus" and the present tense of the verb where it states he "is" Lord, that implies, even demands, that Jesus' exaltation has included resurrection. Paul in other passages is clear he believes this to be true, we should not miss the connection and implication here. And don't let the connection to "even death on a cross" get lost. The full sacrificial work of securing payment for sin, pardon of guilt, and promise of life has been glorified and accepted. The exaltation that involves resurrection does not leave behind or dismiss that exaltation of the glory of the cross. When the Scripture speaks of Christ being "lifted up" it is both on the cross and into glory that this refers.

Exalted Restoration

And this exaltation and resurrection has restored him to that position with the Father that he was said to have "emptied himself" of and left from verse 6. He has been enthroned, has sent the Holy Spirit, and continually intercedes for his own. This is the result of the death and resurrection Jesus experienced, redemption has been accomplished and can now be applied. Those that Jesus can name as His own, he then applies the procurement and power of the cross through the Holy Spirit that He is sending from the throne of the Most High. His name is above every name. We can now think of Jesus where he was when he left that glory of "equality with God" that he hid while he was present on earth. And because of that, all creation will bow and confess his absolute Lordship over it. It is Jesus alone who brings purpose, reason, and consistency in how life should be done. Do not lose sight of the comprehensiveness of this declaration. It is "every" knee and "every" tongue. It is "above, level and below." His name is above "every" name. This is where we are heading that was thought of in Genesis chapter 1 as "very good."

Exalted Rejoicing

But this exaltation is intended to have a real effect on this "everyman." We are to confess this Lordship and rejoice in its meaning. It is only in this that the full glory goes to God the Father. The implied work of the Spirit to bring knees to bowing and tongues to confession. The exaltation of the Christ and his full and perfect sacrifice will indeed be joy to those who believe. Yes, this text is ominous to those who reject Christ. They will bow and confess as well to their own destruction (remember Philippians 1:28, in fact, go back and read the entire first chapter of Philippians as leading up to this statement).

But now we want to move ahead in the text of Philippians and see how Paul uses this "mind", this "way of thinking" about Christ as he uses his own life as an example for how to be "truly Christian." Indeed, how he embodies this "mind of Christ."

Christ's Effect (Philippians 3:7-11)

*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
Indeed, I count everything as loss
because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.
For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish,
in order that I may gain Christ
and be found in him,
not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law,
but that which comes through faith in Christ,
the righteousness from God that depends on faith—
that I may know him and the power of his resurrection,
and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,
that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Gospel transformation

For Paul, Christ was "the Good News." He was the Gospel to bring peace to the world that was promised from Genesis 3, through the narratives of the Patriarchs, the unfolding of the Law, the judgment of the exile, the wisdom and songs of the sages, and the sermons of the prophets. Jesus transforms all those images of the defeat, cleansing, and pardoning of sin to a reality. Paul's own pedigree, merit, and zeal no longer was seen as advancing his position, Jesus alone was the good news. "Christ as Lord" surpasses all that he had ever dreamed he was gaining before. That is how the Gospel works in our lives, it transforms, that is, changes us so that we can, and indeed must, no longer hold to our own "goodness" but see them for the rubbish they are. In our sin we cannot see this, our eyes are blinded, but because of the exaltation of Jesus we can see him and "know" him.

Gospel living

But this Gospel also directs how this is living in the "right now." He endures loss, experiences a shared suffering, eventually even a less-than-glorious death because of his understanding of the Gospel. He recognizes his "righteousness", whether that be what is imputed to his account because of Christ's death or what results in his obedience to Christ, is from God, through faith, empowered by the same power that effected the resurrection of Jesus himself. He lives by faith, trusting in Christ's accomplishment (notice his faith is "in Christ"), knowing there is more, an "ultimate more" yet to come for those who embrace the Gospel.

Gospel hope

Which leads us to see that Paul's personal orientation is also three dimensional. He understands, and wants his readers to understand as well, that the Gospel transformed and changed him in the past, allowing him to leave behind even the good that he thought he was accomplishing as well as the bad that hindered his relationship with the Almighty. He sees it as the basis for his living in the present, that through faith in the work of Christ, both humiliation and exaltation, the Gospel will empower him to endure suffering and complete the tasks that God has before him each day. But he looks forward in hope to the future. He sees the glory of Christ's death as a taste of what real resurrection for himself will look like. This continues as a motivation as well for the struggles he experiences today. His view of the future, as secure in Christ, knowing that in the end everything is subject to Him and will confess Him as Lord, drives his faith as well. Speaking of driving, I have used this analogy a couple to times before to illustrate what this might feel like to many of you. When I took driver's education many years ago, a film we watched challenged us to "aim high in steering". I don't remember much else about this but recognized it as different from what my dad said early in my driving experience to find a line on the corner of the car and keep the edge of the road with it. The driver's education didn't want us focusing on the down here, it wanted us to look up at where we were going. The same with the Gospel. It doesn't expect us to merely look around at our struggles, our weaknesses, our failures. These things are part of living out the Gospel. But we should look up and "aim high in living", looking to the future where the resurrection becomes our reality, and our confession is filled with visible praise.

Reflect and Respond

Resurrection pardon

So, let's bring this in. We should have this mind as did Christ, that sees the Gospel as the answer to the quandaries of the world. The Gospel, with its emphasis on the sacrificial death and resurrected exaltation to glory, brings pardon and forgiveness of our sin. All of them! We should leave the guilt of the past at the cross because the resurrection ensures the satisfaction that God has declared that they are gone. That is because "Christ is risen." And <congregation replies> "He is risen indeed!"

Resurrection living

We should have this mind as did Christ, that sees the Gospel as the anchor of living. The Gospel, because its application is based upon the power that brings one to life from the dead, is the power for my living now. All our self-directed efforts and measurements of holiness are worthless especially when compared to the glory of the exalted Lord of glory. We move from moment to moment in this life only because God is living in us and through us. It is Christ who strengthens us. And this too is because "Christ is risen." And <congregation replies> "He is risen indeed!"

Resurrection hope

And we should have this mind as did Christ, that sees the Gospel promise of the glory before us. The Gospel is the essence of that confession in which we will participate, the distillation of the song we sing as we are ascending the mountain of God. As we as pilgrims in this world are marching to God's presence in glory, we endure the climb, the march, the stumbles, the sweat, because we are together moving to glory, to Zion-the city of God, and the great resurrection hope that awaits. This is because Jesus, our priest and king, himself has risen. Christ is risen! <congregation replies> "He is risen indeed!"