

Philippians 2:1-11

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[0 : 0 0] Well, this morning we are facing some new challenges, but we're also doing some new things. You will notice that the way in which we are going to remember the Lord's death is different. You have these little containers that we're going to make use of, and I don't suppose there has ever been a day when this congregation, and many congregations have done this in this precise manner, but we're thankful that we have this provision made for us so that we can remember the Lord's death in the way that He commanded His disciples. It may not be a common cup. It may not even resemble a common cup, but nonetheless, we are going to remember His death as He has commanded us. And I guess also that it's completely unprecedented. I'm not sure, maybe I'm not telling the truth here, but I think it's never been done before morning and evening.

You'll correct me if I'm wrong. I don't think that this congregation, certainly not in my time, but perhaps in other ministries, but I don't think that it has been done morning and evening.

There's no reason why it can't. There's nothing to say that it has to be a morning celebration or an evening celebration. And again, taking account of the restrictions that we're all having to face, then I think that we have made a wise decision. But also, there's another anomaly, and that is that we're coming up to the time when people generally remember the birth of Jesus. So, actually, in remembering His death, we're also remembering His birth. So, what that means is that I have to find passages in the Bible that connect the birth and the death of Jesus. Now, there's an exercise for you.

How many passages can you think of? How many verses or chapters can you think of that connect directly the birth of Jesus and the death of Jesus? There are actually quite a few, and this is one of them, Philippians chapter 2. This evening, we're going to be looking at another one.

We're going to be gathering around the cross this evening, and we're going to be focusing on Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was the only other person who was at the stable who was also at the cross. Have you ever thought of that? She's the only person, along with Jesus, who was present at His birth, who was also present at His death. And we're going to be focusing on particularly the words that Jesus spoke to Mary, His mother, woman, behold your son. We're going to be asking, do these words have anything to say to us as we gaze at the death of Jesus, which is what we're doing this morning and what I hope we will be doing this evening? Of course, gazing at anyone's death is no pleasant experience. It's a most disturbing thing to watch anyone dying, even someone who is dying peacefully.

[3 : 38] But if it's disturbing to watch that, it must have been horrific to watch the death of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary. That's how low He had come from the heights of heaven that are described to us here in this passage. Let me just read it to you again. In your, verse 5, in your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage. Rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. I do need to tell you that these are probably one of the most profound theological statements in the Bible. But they're not there in order for us to become academics or theologians. They are there for one very practical, mundane purpose. And the purpose was this.

The relationships in the church in Philippi had become frayed. They were breaking down. Things were beginning to go wrong and Paul had to rebuke them and to try to resolve some of the differences, some of the conflicts which were arising in the church in Philippi. Conflict can arise in any church, even Bon Accord.

We have to guard. We have to guard against it. I'm not saying we have to make sure that we never disagree over anything. That's impossible. There'll always be things we disagree on. The question, the challenge is, how do you disagree? The manner in which these conflicts occur. When we disagree with someone, we have to look at ourselves first and we have to say, am I behaving in the right way or is my objective to win this argument just for the sake of winning it? That's our pride. That's our sinfulness coming out and that's what was happening in Philippi. So, in order to address this situation, Paul goes back to, not to the Old Testament, but to Jesus Himself, the Jesus in heaven and the Jesus who condescended from His heavenly glory into the world and who became one of us and who became one of us and the humility that that took for Him to become one of us when He was born in Bethlehem. So, the most profound theological statement in the New Testament is actually there so that we will stop arguing with one another. Isn't that amazing? That God is so concerned about the way we conduct ourselves in His church that He wants us to look at Him as an example of humility and condescension. We are to count one another. We are to regard one another as better than ourselves and this mind needs to be in all of us that was in Jesus. So, Paul is calling us and he's bringing us into heaven. He's bringing us back in time and he's bringing us upwards. So, we're going back and we're going upwards into heaven itself. His first description is of the second person of the

Trinity in heaven in all His heavenly splendor. The second description of that same person is the earthly description of a servant, someone who is of the lower echelons of society and who humbled himself not simply to become a man, but to become a servant and who was obedient even to the death of the cross.

So, let's look first of all at the scene in heaven. The scene in heaven which is given to us in these first few verses. Who being, he's talking about Jesus, who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Now, there are times where the Bible tries to describe God's heavenly glory, but there's an instant difficulty there in that it can't be described in human terms. That doesn't stop God attempting to describe himself using human language. So, I think that's what we have in these words. That language is being stretched in order to bring to us the splendors of the glory of God Himself. Now, even as I talk about that, it's possibly going over some heads. It goes over mine. Who can understand? Who can imagine? But I'm sure that we've all tried to imagine what heaven is like. I've tried, I'm sure that we've all tried to imagine what God looks like.

[9 : 21] Well, you might say to me, well, how does, how can you talk like that? Because God's invisible, yes? And yet, at the same time, we're also told that God is clothed with splendor and with majesty and with glory and with light, blinding light, dazzling light. The kind of light that the disciples saw on the mountain when Jesus became transfigured. That was as much of His glory as was possible to see. And that's what's in heaven. And I want us to try and to imagine that splendor. Imagine the most splendid thing that, or place that you've ever been to. Imagine the glory, the majesty, and you can only imagine what it's like. And imagine also that it was possible to see God, to see God in His three persons.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each one of them in their own splendor. Now, we have to be careful because I don't want to imply that there's a separation. And yet, God is three persons.

He's one God. And yet, He is three persons. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And each person is God.

It's not as if there's a hierarchy with God the Father at the top and God the Son a little bit further down. And God the Spirit, yet a little further down from Him. Each one of these persons is equally God. Whatever is true about God is true about the Father. And it's true about the Son.

And it's true about the Spirit. Let's just dwell on that for a few moments. God is a Spirit. That's what the Catechism says. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. All the things that we know that we should be, but we know we're not, God is in perfection. But He is also the God of splendor, the God of glory. You think of the most glorious event that could ever take place in this world. And God is a million times more splendid than that, dwelling in unapproachable light. Now imagine, stay with me, stay with me for a moment. And you're looking at the Father in His glory. It's impossible, I know, but imagine we're able to do it. And you're, imagine also we're looking at the Son in His heavenly majesty, and the Holy Spirit in His heavenly majesty. And what Paul is saying is that the Son, the focus is on the Son, the second person of the Trinity. That's who we're going to be looking at in particular. And He is as much God as the

[12 : 25] Father and the Spirit. Verse 6, who being in the very nature of God. The old Bible, the King James version says, who being in the form of God. And some people have misunderstood this to mean that somehow that He was less God than the Father. Well, that's not what it means at all. He was every bit as much God, if I can put it that way, as the Father and the Spirit. And that's what's being said in verse 6, who being very nature of God. But then He says something that is really intriguing.

Look with me at the end of verse 6. He did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage. What does He mean by that? Well, I believe that what Paul is doing is He's taking us back to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve, perfect world, Garden of Eden, where God says to them, they can eat the fruit of any tree that they want except one tree, the tree of knowledge and good and evil. And He says to them, the day that you eat thereof, you will surely die. Okay? So that's the one tree that they are not allowed to eat. The day that they eat thereof, they will surely die. So you know the rest of the story, don't you? It doesn't get better than the Garden of Eden. You wouldn't think that they would want for anything. And yet, when the serpent comes along, he shows up and he approaches Eve and he says to her, did God really say that you're not allowed to touch the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? And she said, yes, that's what he said. And then the serpent said to her, well, you know why he said that, don't you? He said that because he knows that you will be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And that's why she took the fruit. Because she wanted to be as God. And for a moment, the way that the serpent put it, it appeared as if she could reach out and become as God by just grasping.

All she needed to do was to take the fruit and she would become as God. And of course, in so doing, she made the greatest catastrophic mistake that anyone has ever made in the history of humanity and brought sin and all its misery into the world. Now, what Paul is saying is that Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, he was God already. And so, Godhood was not something within his grasp like Eve. He had it already. He had the authority. He had the status. He was eternal. He was uncreated.

He was very God of very God. And this is just simply another way of describing Jesus' eternity, the eternity of the second person of the Trinity. He always was. He was uncreated. He had no beginning. His existence stretched back into eternity. We don't understand that, but that's what the Bible says. Now, stay with me. We're in heaven. We're gazing at the majesty of the Father.

[16 : 05] We're gazing at the majesty of the Son. We're gazing at the majesty of the Holy Spirit. And we are completely awestruck. We don't want to be anywhere else because of the sight. We never get used to it.

Even if we were there a million years, we would never get used to the awesomeness of this sight. We would never want to be anywhere else. And we're gazing at the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And do you know what happens? There comes this moment in time, we're gazing at the three persons, and do you know what happens?

The second person disappears. Out of sight. Gone. Gone. Gone. It's not that he has ceased to exist.

But we can't see him anymore because he disappeared. There comes that moment, there came that moment in history when something utterly spectacular took place.

[17 : 12] and this majestic splendid second person of the trinity who has all power and glory he disappears because he has become something that he has never become before he hasn't lost his godness he hasn't left behind his godness he hasn't changed from what he always was and yet he's out of sight you can't see him in heaven anymore where is he do you know where he is he is in the darkest of places he has become invisible to the naked eye he has been translated from the glories and the splendors of heaven and he is now deep within the womb of a 15 year old girl maybe she's 15 16 17 i don't know how old she was and this glorious god is now a split cell in her womb now when i describe it like that i hope it's getting home to you that's exactly what christmas is all about that's what we're celebrating that's what was announced to mary by the angel gabriel no wonder she was deeply troubled because she didn't know what was happening to her and i'm not even sure if even at the time that she knew what was going on but with hindsight and the rest of the new testament we're able to read a passage like this and we're able to go this is unbelievable this is truly spectacular that the second person of the trinity should become a split cell in the womb of the virgin mary because god had acted in order for her to conceive this child because he had a spectacular purpose in mind and it took his own willingness for this to happen do you notice that this is all of jesus doing well of course it was a an agreement between the father and the son but he didn't but it says that he made himself he was willing to come into this world with all that he was taking on in himself and all that he had to face all of the challenges and the weaknesses and the difficulties that there were going to be in being a human being rather verse 7 he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant the original language some of you will know this already some the original language tells us that verse 7 is translated he emptied himself and none of the translations you'll find that the translations don't really want to go down that road of translating it as literally as that because of the misunderstanding that we can get because it can give the impression that somehow that he wasn't as much god as a baby as he had been in heaven that he changed some somewhat and that he became less god or he left his godness behind that's not true and that's the glory and the wonder of bethlehem that this

little baby whose whose nappies are being changed or diapers are being changed and who is who is feeding off his mother's milk and who is who is crying is god fully god and fully man and some people talk about you know uh that he lay that he left his glory behind and i don't know if you you noticed when we're singing hark the herald angels sing um one of the questionable just slightly questionable phrases in that hymn is mild he lays his glory by you ever thought about that mild he lays his glory by do you agree with that so it's always good to to question everything by the way the only thing we don't question is god's word but let's question everything let's think about things mild he lays his glory by is that right is that true did he lay his glory in a sense yes it is true in that the heavenly glory that i just described the splendor of heaven it was put to one side in order for him to condescend into the world however there is another glory in him becoming a baby and him in him becoming one of us there is a particularly unique splendor in god and the incarnation the enfleshment of jesus and that is why the disciple john said we beheld his glory the glory as of the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth because equally we're standing back in amazement aren't we just like we were in heaven we are still standing back in amazement and we are saying why has god done this why has he condescended from the heights of heaven to the depths of this world and it wasn't even as if he was born into a nobility or a palace he was born as a servant into a peasant family surrounded by animals or at least that's what the picture usually is is made to appear as but whatever whatever the reality of bethlehem was he was born in obscurity he was born in poverty he was born without anybody knowing apart from the the shepherds who were out on the fields the night that the angels appeared and they sang glory to god in the highest on earth peace goodwill to all those on whom the favor of god rest that's what they meant that's why because they saw what i've just described to you they saw jesus coming into the world as a baby and yet the story doesn't stop there for too many people it ends at bethlehem it's not going to end at bethlehem in philippians chapter 2 because there was a purpose for him coming into the world and the purpose was to die now when i say that we're all going to die we know that or at least we should know that and we should be aware of it but that is not the reason why we came into the world none of us were born in order to

die but jesus was the objective the aim the mission if you like of him coming into the world was to give his life on the cross so not only did he live as a servant in this world he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even the death on a cross it was absolutely necessary for that death to take place for one reason and that is our salvation we had strayed from god we had fallen humanity had fallen and brought with it the consequences and the guilt and the condemnation of sin each one of us stands in condemnation under god's wrath and his judgment and yet god so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son and what that word gave means is not just him coming into the world but his death on the cross in which he gave himself as the sacrifice for our sin because on the cross the guilt of our sin was placed upon the son of god the perfect son of god himself and the punishment that we so richly deserved he was willing to take it instead of us so that he became our substitute and died instead of us that's why the cross is the central event in the life that's why we so richly deserved he was willing to take it instead of us to take it instead of us that's why we want to remember it especially this morning because the cross is god's love for you and me a love that doesn't just say that he loves us but a love that was prepared to go the length that he did in order to bring us back to him by forgiving our sin by transforming us and by raising us from being dead in sin and by giving us everlasting life that could not have happened if jesus had not given himself on the cross and if our sin had not been paid for by him as he gave himself in death and so i want us to think this morning as we remember the death of jesus i want us to think of the height from which jesus came the majesty that belonged to him and that today does belong to him i want us to think of the depths to which he was prepared to go the place that he was prepared to arrive at the death that he was prepared to enter into in order to transform us and to rescue us and to bring us into newness of life i want us to think about that as we as we think again reflect again on these great words that jesus was in the very nature of god rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant

by being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross and of course the passage goes on in verse 9 to go into the future therefore god exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name that at the name of jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue acknowledge that jesus christ is lord to the glory of god the father may we with that great name on our lips and in our hearts this morning may we reflect with love and with repentance and with adoration on what jesus has done for us in giving himself and in going all the way to death the shedding of his blood the breaking of his body the pain and the agony that he suffered on the cross but not just physically the isolation the turning away of god the father the dereliction of the cross the darkness the shame and all because we were lost and bankrupt sinners and needed to be rescued and needed to be set free from the power and from the guilt of sin our father in heaven we pray that as we now take the elements that represent the broken body and the shed blood of the lord jesus christ we pray that we may look to him that we may gaze on the suffering servant the suffering lord jesus christ because it is only as the lamb of god who takes away the sin of the world that our sin can be forgiven and that we can be set free so father we pray that this will be blessed to us now in jesus name amen