

The Christmas Baby Bound for the Cross

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[0 : 00] Well, today we begin our Advent series and we start off by looking at what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian church about Jesus. So before we read the text, just give me a few seconds just to lay out the context a little bit for us.

Paul's purpose for writing this letter to these young believers was to encourage them in the face of persecution and opposition. There was conflict outside the church and there was conflict inside the church.

There was some disunity among believers in this young church. And Paul is emphasizing our great need for humility as we seek to grow in grace, grow in Christ.

Humility is so important. And in this passage, he's pointing them to the humility of Christ. And Paul himself had been a very proud person, right?

We know, but God had humbled him, brought him to humility, brought him to Christ. And he was in humble circumstances because he was writing to them from prison. So follow along with me as we read from the first 11 verses of Philippians chapter 2.

[1 : 11] So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, in the Holy Spirit, any affection and sympathy, Paul says, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

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.

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.

Amen. These are the words of the Lord for us today. Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you again for an opportunity to come and to look at your word, to worship you in song, to pray to you, just to acknowledge our dependence upon you.

[2 : 58] We thank you for what you have done for us in Christ Jesus. Thank you for your continual encouragement and renewal that comes to us from the good news of the gospel.

Teach us today. Teach your people today, Father. Together we seek to live our lives in humble gratitude for your saving and your sanctifying work. And we will praise you in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. You can be seated. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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[3 : 56] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. some of the non-Christian elements of what we do at Christmas time. And some Christian families are determined to reclaim Christmas by rejecting it, either rejecting it or reimagining it.

So I'm for reimagining it, not for rejecting it. I love the traditions at Christmas, even though a lot of them are not, we don't get them from Scripture. From what I understand, early Christians didn't even celebrate the birth of Christ. They didn't celebrate even their own birthdays because of some of the pagan association with all of that. And more and more young adults and families are reclaiming Advent in their Christmas observance, according to this article, which is good. It's a good

thing, right? I love the Advent candles and the emphasis on preparing our hearts, you know, over the month of December, these next 24 days, I guess, before Christmas Day.

We have a copy of Everyday Gospel, a Christmas devotional by Paul David Tripp. I think we have enough copies for everybody. And it starts today, December the 1st. And you can take one of those, I think they're available at the entrances, at the front and on the sides. But, you know, it's, as God's people, we want to focus our minds away from all the wonder and the music and the lights, beyond all of that, the shopping and the parties and the food and the Christmas movies, to the wonder and the humility of Christ our Savior. We don't just want to focus on the birth of the baby Jesus, but we want to remember the reason that he came, right? We want to remember the reason was that he would suffer humiliation on our behalf. So, it's good for us to spend a little bit more time in the Scriptures this Christmas season. So, I hope you will do that as you prepare your heart for worship. And don't forget, we have a Christmas service on Christmas Day. It's just a one-hour service.

If you've never come to Christmas Day service, we want to encourage you to come out and join us. There's nothing more important than spending time with the Lord Jesus in his Word and prayer and praise at Christmastime. Here's the question for you. You know, what does the gospel story of the humility and the saving work of Christ do in you, and what should it do through you? You know, what difference does it make? What difference does Christmas make in the way we live our lives throughout the year?

What does it do in you, the gospel message, and what does it do through you? I believe that reflecting on the humility and love of Christ will inspire you to grow more in your love for him and in your loving service for others. In other words, the humility and love of Jesus moves us to obey the greatest commandment, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. That's where we're going with the message this morning. Two things.

[7 : 31] First of all, Jesus' humility and love inspires us and empowers us to love one another in unity. It unifies us in love for one another. And secondly, Jesus' humility and love inspires us and empowers us to die to ourselves and to live for others. So die to yourself so you can live for others.

So loving one another in unity. The young church in Philippi was in a little bit of a trouble, in a little trouble. They were suffering persecution. They were faced with many opponents of the gospel. They were struggling with some disunity and internal strife. And in light of the humility and love of Christ, Paul was calling them to love one another together in unity, not to give in to the enemy's attempts to divide them, which would hinder the spread of the gospel. And Paul was no stranger to trouble himself, to persecution and suffering. Paul had learned to just expect it. You know, it was part of his ministry. It goes with the territory of the spread of the gospel. And we know that God is a church-planting missionary God, right? He's on mission, planting churches among the nations, bringing people to himself. And his mission and his ministry would be marked by suffering. The Lord Jesus' mission. He was sent here as a missionary, if you will. And Jesus' ministry would be marked with trouble and suffering. Saving the world is not accomplished without hardship. Hardship is a part of the process of the gospel advancing to the nations. Paul had been to Philippi, and God had sent him and Silas on a missionary journey to take the gospel to Philippi. And we can read about it in Acts chapter 16. God gave Paul a vision, you remember, of a man from Macedonia saying, come over here and help us. We need some help. So come and help us. So he and Silas went. And God had some people there that he wanted to rescue. And the first person to believe in Christ was a woman named Lydia, one of several women who were in a group outside the city. And Paul and Silas were speaking with them. And Luke records that the Lord opened Lydia's heart to pay attention to what Paul had said. So the Lord was working already with Lydia. It says that she was a worshiper of God, but she came to know the true God. Lydia and her entire household were baptized. And Paul and Silas were urged to stay with her at her home while they continued to share the gospel. So God was beginning his work in Philippi with Paul and Silas. And at one point they were on their way to pray, and they met a poor girl who was controlled by a demonic spirit. And she was following Paul and Silas around and calling out, proclaiming who they were. And the spirit had given her information, maybe about the secrets of people's lives. And this poor young woman was being trafficked by some men who were charging money for her services, for her fortune-telling services.

But Paul did the loving thing, and he commanded the spirit to come out of her. And of course, this didn't go over well with the men. They lost their demonic source of income. They were pretty upset, and they dragged Paul and Silas before the town magistrates. And these Roman magistrates had Paul and Silas, they had their clothes torn off, had them beaten with rods, and thrown in prison. And their feet were fastened into the stocks.

[11 : 34] So you'd think that Paul and Silas would be pretty discouraged at this point, right? You know, this church-planting strategy wasn't going so well for them. And you'd think that the advance of the gospel had just come to a screeching halt. However, God had them right where he wanted them. See, they had a captive audience. They had the prisoners in prison and the jailer. And God was getting ready to do something that would prove the authenticity of his message. As Paul and Silas, they were singing hymns and praying out loud at midnight. You remember, there came what we refer to as an act of God. God sent a little controlled earthquake, just strong enough to shake the foundations of the prison so that all the doors flew open and the stocks were broken. And there they were. The jailer thought that, you know, he was a dead man because all the prisoners were going to escape or had escaped. And he pulled out his sword and was ready to take his own life. And Paul called out to him to stop. You know, they weren't going to run away from the trouble. None of the other prisoners ran away, even though they were, you know, they could have escaped. They probably were more interested in seeing what would happen next.

You know, they were just in awe of what had just happened. They wanted to stick around. So revival actually broke out in the prison. The Philippian jailer gave his life over to Christ. He took them and washed their wounds and says he and his entire family were baptized. So you see, God is growing the church. Great fear came over the magistrates who had thrown God's missionaries in prison. Now they realized that the God of Paul and Silas was a powerful God and he was serious. He was serious about the message of the gospel getting out. And they did a complete 180. They came to Paul and Silas and personally begged forgiveness from them and immediately released them from prison. And the gospel advanced. The church in Philippi was established. See, suffering and conflict is to be expected when you're on mission with God. Jesus' humility and love inspires us and empowers us to love one another in spite of and in the midst of conflict. We're not to lose our heads over suffering and trouble.

You know, we're not to give in to conflicts and division, conflicts from outside, conflicts within our own selves, conflicts with other people. The humble way in which Jesus came to live among his people in the way that he suffered in love for us is really the prime example that God uses suffering and difficult circumstances to advance the gospel. Jesus is our example. If we're trying to do gospel ministry, you know, and everything is perfectly smooth, there's no opposition, there's no struggle, everything's going well, there's no shortage of funds, there's no interpersonal conflict with anyone, it's just possible that God has left the room because that's not the way he does things, right? You know, we're not to try to cause trouble or to make trouble for other people or to, you know, make trouble for the gospel, but we're to just accept that God may allow suffering in our lives and in the ministry for the sake of others, for the sake of bringing healing to others, for the sake of the nations. Paul exhorts the members of this struggling church in Philippi that they do have the power. They have the encouragement in Christ and his loving work. They have the comfort of his love, he says. They all participate together in God's Holy Spirit. They've experienced the affection and the sympathy of God for them as sinners and they have his empowering presence for their own affection and sympathy for one another.

For the lost people in Philippi, they had the power to love those people in spite of opposition and nothing would give Paul greater joy, he says, than if they would demonstrate supernatural unity among themselves by being of the same mind and the same love. He says in verse 2, being in full accord and of one mind. He says, have this mind of Christ your Savior. Consider others more significant than others. And look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. So God wants you to use your spiritual gifts with others in an agreeable and cooperative way, with a spirit of cooperation, and to do that with a focus on the glory of God and the spread of the gospel for those who are hungry for a relationship with him. And the only way we can experience this radical, supernatural kind of love for one another at our church, at New City Fellowship, you know, with all the diversity of opinions, my goodness, you know, different ages and stages, gender differences, different ethnicities, personalities and gifts, different life experiences. The only way we can ever hope to experience this kind of humility and love for one another is through the indwelling power of

the Holy Spirit.

[17 : 30] The Holy Spirit has to come and empower us to be able to get along for the glory of God, so that the kingdom of God will advance, you know, in our natural ability, in our flesh.

We'll always default to pride, to unloving thoughts and behaviors. Instead of having a cooperative spirit, you know, in our flesh, you know, in our flesh, in the church family, that the flesh leads to a competitive spirit, or maybe even a combative spirit. You'll tend to find yourself in an adversarial relationship with others. It takes the filling of God's Spirit to keep us at peace with one another so that the gospel can advance, so the gospel is unhindered. And without the filling of the Holy Spirit, you know, we're tempted to look for reasons to judge one another, to look for faults, rather than looking for ways to love others in their weakness and their faults, as the Lord has loved us in our weakness, in our own faults. You know, we can't live out this gospel unity that Paul is encouraging in our own strength. We have to recognize the difficulty and hardship, and sometimes the troubles that come to us are just part of the normal Christian life. It's the part of the normal way of doing church that's on mission, a church that's on mission, advancing the good news to a hostile world, to an ambivalent world. Jesus' humility and his love inspire us, and they also, it empowers us to love one another in unity. And Jesus' humility and love also inspires us and empowers us to die to ourselves, to live for others. Dying to yourself and living for others, Paul in verses 5 to 11, he reminds the believers there in this young church in Philippi, and he reminds us where our example is found and where the power comes from. He paints the most beautiful picture of Christ and his saving work for us in this section. This is really the centerpiece of his letter, verses 5 to 11.

And here he shows our Lord's example of humble missionary service out of love for sinners like you and me. And this section is referred to the hymn of Christ or the poem of Christ because of its style and beauty in the original Greek. And some think Paul may have been adapting a hymn of the early church that was sung in praise for what Christ had done, or Paul could have crafted it himself. But in these few verses, he traces for us Jesus' pre-existence in eternity, his taking on human flesh and human weakness.

He traces his death and his resurrection and his ascension back to the place of honor and unlimited power at the right hand of God. So let's read again verses 4 to 8 and try to unpack them a little bit as we think about dying to ourselves and living for others. Can we put that text back up on the screen maybe and leave it up there for a little while? Here it comes. All right. From verse 5. There you go. From verse 5.

He says, 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 he 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 the death on a cross. So in your spiritual journey with Christ, if you want to make progress to grow in grace, then here's your example. Right here. These few verses, dying to yourself for the sake of others is the example we have from Paul. And Sinclair Ferguson writes that when the great theologian Augustine, he was asked to list the central principles of the

[22 : 14] Christian life. They asked him, you know, what are the main principles? He said, first of all, there's humility. Second, there's humility. And third, there's humility. The essential ingredients for living the Christian life, for growing in grace is humility. To grow in grace, we need the humble mindset of Christ. Paul says, have this mind, the mind of Christ. And think about his phrase in verse 5.

He says, have this mind, which is yours in Christ. Which is yours in Christ Jesus. Right?

Is he telling his friends in Philippi that they already have the mind of Christ? You know, do you have the mind of Christ?

What would you say? Yes? No? Yes and no? The mind of Christ? Maybe on Sunday morning when you're sitting here, right, we came to church today, right? We came to church today and we sang these wonderful hymns about Christ.

Yes, I have the mind of Christ today. But Monday morning, maybe not so much. What do you think? Or is he saying that they are to model the mind of Christ in the humble way in what, in the way he has served us? You know, if someone were to ask you, do you have the mind of Christ today?

[23 : 47] Well, the right answer is yes. Because you have the mind of Christ and you are to model the mind of Christ. Both are theologically true. Because of your being united to Christ, right, you already have this mind because the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of

Christ. The Spirit of Christ, God's Holy Spirit, is indwelling you. So that's how you're able to think with the mindset of Christ, because you have the Holy Spirit. And without the grace of Christ, without the indwelling Spirit that brings the mind of Christ to you, then you really have no power to think like Christ. So we shouldn't be too hard on people who don't know, who've never heard the gospel, who have not yet received the grace of Christ, because they think in ways that are, to us it just seems kind of crazy. But as a believer, your union with Christ should also lead to imitation of Christ. You see what I'm, see what we're getting at? Your union with Christ, your having the mind of Christ leads you to imitate Christ. So in our flesh, we all have this form of mental illness in a way because, you know, only the mind of Christ is perfectly clear, perfectly healthy, perfectly at peace with himself. None of us are, our minds are perfectly clear. We're not at complete peace with ourselves all the time with our identity in Christ. Because of our sinful disposition, our minds come up with all kinds of thoughts that are unclear, unhealthy, or at conflict with ourselves or with our true identity in who we are in Christ. So for a Christian who is united to Christ, you know, to intentionally pursue a life of disobedience to God is really a form of madness. It's a form of mental illness because we've rejected the mind of Christ, the Holy Spirit in us to follow the, to think like Christ thinks. It's ignoring the mind of Christ and really having a mind of your own. And Jesus's parable of the two sons that I love so much in Luke 15, it's really a study in spiritual and mental illness. You think about it because neither the young son nor the older son were thinking with clear minds. Only the gracious father was completely sane in Jesus's parable. He understood, right? Jesus was giving an example of the gospel, of the gracious father's love. He alone was thinking with the mind of Christ. And Paul goes on to point out the humility of Christ in this passage. He says, though Jesus was in the form of God, he didn't count equality with God a thing to be grasped. So before King Jesus was formed in the womb of Mary, he was in the form of God. We know that, right? He was the preexistent one. He existed long before that supernatural pregnancy that the angel Gabriel announced to Mary. He was the eternal son of God, equal with the father. He was the exact imprint of the father's nature, the writer of Hebrews says.

John in chapter one, verse one says, in the beginning was the word, referring to Jesus, and the word was with God and the word was God. In his prayer for his disciples in John 17, Jesus prays that his disciples would see his glory. He says, the glory that I had with the father before the world existed. So Jesus was proclaiming right there. It's so clear that he was proclaiming who he was, the I am, Jesus, his equality with the father. Jesus Christ is and always has been God.

Sinclair Ferguson, he also points out that there's this great contrast between Jesus and Adam, and how Paul describes Jesus in these verses. He says it's like, he describes it like Adam in reverse. [28 : 23] So Adam, who was created in the image of God, but was not equal with God, what did he do? He grasped at equality with God. He disobeyed God. He wanted to be like God. He listened to the serpent, and he brought death into the whole world with the curse and the fall. Jesus, on the other hand, who was rightfully equal with God, he didn't grasp onto his glory and privilege. He didn't hold it so tightly that he had to keep it for his own benefit or his own advantage. In humility, Jesus emptied himself, Paul says. Or he made himself nothing is another way of saying it, taking the form of a servant.

Emptying himself doesn't mean that he emptied out any of his deity. It's not talking about deity. He's talking about humility. It has to do with humility. Jesus did what Adam referred to, refused to do. Adam refused to serve God and chose to just serve himself. Jesus, the eternal son of God, he obeyed in every way. At every point of his life, he became obedient to God, even to the point of death.

And in Romans 5, Paul makes an extended comparison between Jesus and Adam. He says, whereas Adam's sin and disobedience brought sin and death into the world, Jesus' obedience, on the other hand, brought righteousness and life for all who would receive him.

And Jesus became obedient to the will of the Father all throughout his life. From the cradle to the cross, Jesus obeyed the Father at every step, taking on humanity in the weakness of a baby, the dangers of his parents having to flee with him to Egypt from the murderous Herod, growing into a boy who humbly submitted to his earthly parents, and growing into a man who, he said, was always dependent on the heavenly Father. He said, I don't do anything apart from my Father. Such humility of Jesus, facing the torture of Roman crucifixion and the crushing weight of our sin and separation from the Father because of our sin.

[30 : 48] Jesus was obedient. You know, in his most difficult hour, what did he say? He said, you know, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me. But not my will, but your will be done.

Jesus took the form of a servant, and he was born in the likeness of men, Paul says, in humility and love for sinners, he took on a position of poverty and weakness. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. Do you think of yourself as a rich person? Do you realize how rich you are? And do you think of those riches coming to you as a direct result of his poverty? Because he chose to humble himself and to come in poverty, you have been given all the riches that you could imagine.

Not only did Christ humble himself to live as a servant on your behalf, to take this position of weakness and poverty, but he went much further. Paul says he became obedient to God to the point of death, even the death on a cross. Now, we know a little bit about Roman crucifixion. It's not believed that the Romans came up with crucifixion, but somebody before the Romans, some person who had a very evil mind, came up with this method of torture.

[32 : 29] And the death on a cross was designed to not just kill a person, but really to completely destroy the person through the most degrading humiliation. One writer comments that no other form of death, no matter how prolonged or physically agonizing, could match crucifixion as an absolute destruction of the person. It was the ultimate counterpoint to the divine majesty of the preexistent Christ, and thus was the ultimate expression of Christ's obedience to the Father. So there at the end of this hymn of Christ is the ultimate expression of the humble obedience of Christ to the Father, that he went to the cross, that he allowed himself to be crucified, his person, his human person, completely destroyed. Jesus demonstrated that he was divine when he submitted himself to the suffering of the cross for the sake of dealing with your sin and mine. That's an argument right there. That's an apologetic argument for the deity of Christ. Because he submitted himself to the cruel form of death on a cross.

And because of his perfect obedience, Paul says, the Father raised him and highly exalted him with a name that is above every name. And at the mention of his name, every knee in heaven and on earth, and even under the earth, should bow and worship and confess that he is Lord. That's our Jesus. That's our King.

And even in his exaltation, we see a glimpse of his humility and honor of the Father, because his being honored in this way, his exaltation, is for the purpose of bringing glory to God the Father. You know, at this moment in time, right now, Jesus is not seeking his own glory at the expense of the glory of his Father. Jesus' humility and love, it inspires us and empowers us to die to ourselves and to live for others. So what are some practical takeaways for us as individuals and as the church? As individuals, Christians, and as the church here at New City Fellowship, where do we need more supernatural power to die to ourselves, to live for others? You know, probably the time we need the Holy Spirit's power the most to help us to die to our own interests is when we're in conflict with someone else, right?

It's when I'm having a disagreement with my wife, which is very rare, right? Ah. 40 years, right, helps to know each other well enough that we don't get into conflict.

[35 : 40] But that's the time when, you know, if and when it does come, it's at that time that we need the presence of the Holy Spirit. You know, and Paul actually addresses some specific conflict between believers in the church in Philippi. For example, he addresses by name two women who were, he was encouraging to be of the same mind and to agree in the Lord. We're not sure what the conflict was, but there was a big enough conflict that it became apparent to Paul who was not there. He had heard about it. And so he says that to Iodia and Syntyche, he rebukes grumbling and arguing among themselves. And the proclamation of the gospel is hindered by their disunity and their unresolved conflict. And the same is true of us here, as it would be in that young church in Philippi, right?

When you think about the advance of the gospel, the conflicts that we might have in our church are a hindrance. If they go unresolved, they're a hindrance to God's missionary church planting strategy that he wants people from every nation and tribe to come to him, people around us in our community. You know, in what situations have we seen disunity in our own lives and in our church? Paul would encourage us to have the same mind, to be unified around the advance of the gospel, to put away rivalry and conceit and selfish ambition, to in humility consider others more significant than yourselves. He would challenge us to lean on the Holy Spirit's power and Christ's example for

the sake of the gospel. You know, if you're troubled in any way in your spirit today, just ask for more of his spirit to bring the mind of Christ to you. Jesus encourages us. If we want more of the spirit, just ask. Simply ask for the spirit to fill us and to bring the Lord of peace to where there's conflict or trouble. Amen? So we can only know our past and our present, right? We don't know what the future holds. 2025 could be a good year for us individually, for our families, for our church. It could be a year of suffering. It could be a year of suffering in the world. It seems like that our world is often on the brink of falling into huge conflict. So just take one little spark for superpowers to get into a raging armed conflict with one another. In our families, we don't know what the future holds, what suffering may come in our health, in our city, but we do know who holds the future, right? Because of the Christmas baby who came from heaven, who came in humility, who was born as an ordinary Jew, who went from the manger to the cross, we are confident in who holds our future. We know that he's always working for our good. In the midst of trouble, we know that he's working for our good. We know that he allows difficult circumstances and suffering to advance the gospel in our own hearts, in our own minds, in the world. Someone said that the kingdom of God advances through friends, so go and make friends. Pastor Jeff McGee at New City St. Louis, I was up there visiting my daughter and her husband and went to church with them at New City, and he preached a great message encouraging people to get involved in the ministries of their church. He said, we've provided the infrastructure for you now.

All you got to do is just use your gifts. He was trying to encourage people not to sit in the chairs or in the pew, but get involved. And I remember he closed his message. He said, Jesus took care of your business, so you take care of his. With his humility and his love, you know, let's die to ourselves at New City. Let's love one another.

Let's live together in unity for the sake of others. Let's take care of his business. Amen? And let's pray. Father, we thank you again for giving us your spirit to continually remake us, that you are not finished with us, the work that you started with each one of us, our stories, how we came to faith. We're on this great journey with you, and you are continuing to renew us and remake us more and more into your image. So give us more of your spirit. Empower us. As your children, we have the mind of Christ. Give us more of the mind of Christ to control us and to free us for spiritual and sane, healthy living. Father, free us to be humble as Jesus models humility for us.

[41 : 03] Free us to love you and to love others more. Free us to be able to die to ourselves and live for the sake of others, for the good news of the gospel. And we'll give you praise in Jesus' name. Amen.