

You'll remember that the early believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. And this morning I want us to do those same things, because what was important to the early church is of course equally important to God's church today. **God** hasn't changed, the thing he **desires** haven't changed, the things he wants us to **do** haven't changed.

Let's imagine what it was like for that early church. I'm sure they would have clung together as much as they could because they had wonderful experiences in common. They would've met in each others' homes, had meals together, and they would have talked and prayed and sung together.

I'm sure they would've talked about the miracles Jesus had done amongst them. They would've reminded each other of things Jesus had **said** would happen, and they **had** happened. They would've shared together things they'd just realised, as the penny dropped, how Jesus fulfilled what the Old Testament scriptures said the Messiah would.

They would've reminded each other of what Jesus told them to do to remember him, things they should do to stay close to God. He told them to take the bread and the wine, in remembrance of him. I can imagine that those times would've been so encouraging, so inspiring, so heart-warming, so precious. I pray that as we meet together, we'll experience the encouragement, the inspiration, the warming of our hearts, as we talk about what Jesus has said and done for us.

The last time I preached in April, we considered passages from Philippians chapters 1 and 3, and I deliberately left out chapter 2, because I felt the Lord wanted me to bring this to a Communion meeting. So here we are. Let's read together from Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 2.

Verses 6 – 11 have particular relevance to us as we take communion, but we need to set those verses in context. Throughout this passage there are things that should amaze us; things that should cause us to stop and be amazed. If ever any passage should make us say 'Wow!', this is it.

Paul is writing to the believers in Philippi – the first church he planted on European soil – reminding them of all that they are in Christ. *'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation,'* Paul writes to the Corinthians, and so the actions and motivations of believers should be different from what they once **were**, and **different** from those of people in the world.

And verses 1 – 5 tell us that Christians are united to Christ, in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, experiencing the gracious love of God, and these things should **change** our whole outlook.

Paul asks the Philippians to be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Christians are united **by** Christ, united **in** Christ, and united **for** Christ. Jesus has brought people together from every nation and background, he has united them together through his Spirit, we are like-minded because God's **Spirit** lives within us, and he has united us in purpose, to spread the message of God's love and grace to a needy world.

Christians are **different** and we need to show that difference in our **attitudes**. The problem of man right the way down through history is that **we** want to be in charge of our lives, we want to be in overall control, we want to be on top, and we'll do whatever it takes to achieve it. Generally speaking man does things for his own benefit, to get the best for **himself**, without regard to others. We're **selfish**.

But Paul says things should be **different** for Christians; Verse 3 tells us that we should '*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*' The Christian message turns the world's motivations **upside down**. Don't look only to your own interests, look to the interests of **others**, Paul says. How difficult this is for the world to do. But it has to be true of Christians.

It has to be true of us, and it **can** be true of us. How? This is the amazing thing – we **can** be like this, because we're Christians, we're **in Christ**, Christ lives by his Spirit in us, we know that Jesus is changing us to be like **him**. Jesus has gone before, he's making us like himself, we can be like him in our whole attitude: verse 5, '*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus ...*'

Wow. Stop for a moment. The way **your** mind works, the way **you** shape your attitude can be the same as **Jesus**, the Son of God. Isn't that amazing? Your attitude to the way you live your life, the same as that of Jesus. Doesn't this amaze you? Doesn't this encourage you? Doesn't this warm your heart? Doesn't this fill you with joy? It shouldn't leave us feeling cold – we're missing something if it does.

But of course the most amazing things come in the following verses.

Imagine the Christians all sitting together around someone reading this letter from their good friend and brother, Paul. They're excited because he was the one who first brought them the gospel of Jesus. So they're hanging on every word. 2

And they get to this section – it wouldn't have been split up into chapters and verses then of course. And the reader starts reading from our verse 6, and those gathered would've recognised these words because it's generally accepted that Paul is here quoting from a hymn or song that the Philippians would have known. I'm sure that at these words some of them may have just **burst** into song because these words tell of amazing eternally earth-shattering events.

Let's look closer at these things – firstly in verses 6 and 7 we read about Jesus' incarnation, when he became man; and secondly in verse 8 we read of his sacrifice. All of this with special significance as we take the bread and the wine a little later.

[Jesus], *'being in very nature God,'* reminds us that Jesus **is** and always **has** been, God. The words used in the original Greek give us more than can be put simply here – Jesus was in his **very nature** God, he was **absolutely** God, everything about him was God, inwardly and outwardly he was God, he was **truly, really, fully** God. In very nature God.

The writer to the Hebrew Christians wrote, *'The Son [Jesus] is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.'* Hebrews 1:3. Jesus was and is God.

John at the beginning of his gospel writes, *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word **was** God.'* And he goes on to introduce Jesus as the Word, who created all things and reveals God to us. Jesus was and is God. In **very nature** God. He has always been God from the beginning, through him all things were created, Paul writes to the Colossians. He is God, Alpha and Omega, beginning and end, Jesus **is** God.

'Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,' tells of what Jesus was willing to give up to **save** us from the judgement of God. Jesus was God and all the privileges and glories and riches of heaven were his **by right**, because he was **God**. All the precious treasures of heaven were his, because he was God. Being equal with God the Father, enjoying all the eternal glories of heaven, these were in the possession of Jesus.

Yet he *'did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,'* He didn't **cling** on to these things, he didn't **refuse** to give them up, he didn't insist on holding tightly to these things, he didn't consider everything that he enjoyed in heaven something to cling on to at all cost. Jesus by right as very God possessed the glories of heaven, but he was willing to give these up for a while, for you and me. He was willing to surrender all he experienced in heaven, for you and me. 3

I don't know about you, but I find it hard to give up the warmth and comfort of my bed in the morning, never mind any of the other things I enjoy. But just think about it; Jesus freely gave up all he had in heaven, **paradise**, perfection of existence, perfect relationship with God the Father, with all the power and splendour, riches and glory that go with it. I can't even **start** to think how hard that would've been. But Jesus abandoned all that was precious for what was to **him** an even more desirable purpose – to save you and me. Can you believe it? Can your brain take that in? Mine can't. What amazing love. To Jesus, an even more desirable purpose – to save you and me

But wait – there's more: Not only did Jesus deny himself his rights and **privileges**, *'But he made himself nothing,'* Notice that it was **his** decision, **his** choice. He **voluntarily** made himself nothing. There was no force here, he didn't **have** to leave heaven, he **chose** to make himself nothing. Paul reminds us in Romans 15:3 that *'even Christ did not please himself,'* he could've continued enjoying that wonderful existence in heaven, but he put **our** needs first. He didn't have to.

Well in one way, I suppose, he **did** have to take this action – because his love and compassion could not **bear** to see his creation, those he'd made in his own image, heading for eternal separation from God. He had to do **something** because he loved us so much that he couldn't just do nothing while we had to suffer punishment for neglecting God. This gives us great insight into the mind of Christ – remember, our attitudes are to be the same as that of Christ – he loved **us** – his sinful creations – so much that he was willing to leave heaven and to make himself nothing to rescue all who would believe in him. He made **himself** nothing.

This does **not** mean, of course, that he ever stopped being God. Calvin says that Jesus didn't become less God, but **concealed** it. Elsewhere this word translated 'made nothing' is translated as 'deprived', so Jesus deprived himself of what was his right, he laid aside the power and glory of his Lordship for a while. Jesus was still fully God when he came down from heaven.

And of course all the miraculous things he did while he was on earth clearly show that he **didn't** become any less than God. He had power over all of creation, from healing the sick, to raising from the dead, to stilling the sea. He remained fully God.

And John wrote about Jesus' miracles in his gospel, *'these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.'* John 20:30.

But wait – there’s more: *‘But [Jesus] made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.’* The way Jesus made himself nothing was in taking on the very nature of a servant. We’re to have attitudes like Jesus, not that he gave up any of his character, but that he took on the nature of a **servant**, putting **others** first. This is the attitude we’re to have.

Jesus said of himself, *‘For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’* Mark 10:45. We are called to put the interests of others before ours. Jesus came to serve, being made in human likeness. He made himself nothing, confining himself to being made in human likeness. In very nature **God**, but he was made in human likeness. He took the form of a servant, and of course this would speak very clearly to those who knew the Old Testament Scriptures, because the prophet Isaiah wrote about God’s Servant, who would suffer and pour out his life for God’s people.

The **impossible** happens with Jesus. How can God be found in human form? How can this happen? Everything that God is, surely that’s just too big to be squeezed into a man. How can this happen? It can, because this is **God** – he is God of the **impossible**. If we sit and think about it too much we’ll drive ourselves mad. Sooner or later we just have to accept that it was possible, it could be done, and it **was** done because Jesus is **God**.

He took the form of an obedient, humble servant, made in human likeness. The same word that was used in verse 6 to say that he was in his very nature God, absolutely God, truly, really, fully God, is now used again in verse 7; he was in his very nature man, absolutely man, truly, really, fully man, a servant.

Paul speaks of being set free from the law of sin and death, and this *‘God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.’* Romans 8:3. Jesus brought all of his divine nature into the form of a servant in human likeness, so that he might pour out his life, a sacrifice for our sin. Unbelievable. Unimaginable. When looking at all the things that need to get crammed into our little car when we go on holiday, I don’t know how we do it sometimes. I don’t **know** how God contracted himself into the form of a man, but I am certain that he **did**. How amazing. Are you thinking **‘Wow’** yet?

But wait – there’s more: not only did Jesus deny himself his rights and make himself nothing, not only did he take the very nature of a servant, not only was he made in human likeness, the **most** amazing thing is still to come:

‘And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.’ Jesus, the Son of God **died**. Jesus, One who had **always** existed with God the Father in heaven, the **immortal** one, **died**.

Jesus chose to take on human likeness – there was no difficulty with people accepting **that**, they could see that he was a man, fully man. But it took a whole lot more to convince them that he was who he **claimed** to be, **God**. He was the same as other men in appearance, but there was something **different** about him. People were **amazed** at the things he said – he spoke with an authority like no other. And the things he did showed that he had divine authority; over nature – he told the seas to be calm and they were; he told demons to leave the possessed and they **did**; he told the lame to walk and they **did**; he told the dead Lazarus to rise and he **did**. People saw him do things **no man** could do.

Disciple Peter, recognised who he was. When Jesus asks him, *‘Who do you say I am?’* Simon Peter answered, *‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’* Matthew 16:16. He recognises Jesus as nothing less than the Son of God.

But this was before Jesus began teaching them that he would have to die. Everyone knows that God can never die, because God has power over **everything**, even death. God is immortal. But Jesus was even prepared to humble himself unto death, he humbled himself to death on a cross, for you, for me. He came to do the will of his Father, he came obedient to God the Father; though he was rich, he became poor, took on the nature of a servant, and did the will of God even though it meant he would have to die.

The disciples were confused – wouldn’t you be? The one who’d revealed himself to them as God, hung on the cross and died. The immortal died. Can it be? How can it be? Why should it be? Why does it have to be?

Jesus went to the cross, obedient to the will of God, **pleased** to do the will of God. Scripture says *‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’* Jesus became a curse for us, so that he could take upon himself the punishment due for our sins, so that we may be rescued, we might be saved. The ultimate obedience, even to death on a cross. He gave himself for us. Jesus made himself nothing, and humbled himself, he willingly went to the cross. He did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many. For sinners’ sake – for our sake – he held nothing back.

[Sing ‘The Servant King’ 396]

[Communion]

But this was not the end of the hymn quoted in Philippians 2. [Read 2:9-11] Those first Christians on European soil in Philippi would know the reality of Jesus' death, but also the reality of his **resurrection**. So we read here of the **risen** and **exalted** Lord Jesus. Of **course** the grave could not hold him. Of **course** death wouldn't have the victory over him. Jesus is **God**. Jesus is **immortal**. Jesus is **risen** and lives forever.

'Therefore', we read; because Jesus was willing to hold nothing back and was obedient even to death on a cross which was the whole purpose of Jesus becoming a man, humbly giving his life for the salvation of man, because of **this**, God raised him to the **highest** place, the position which he had refused to grasp, refused to cling onto in verse 6.

In response to his obedience, he's been given a new status, he's been given a name that is above **every** name, and that name is '**Lord**', Jesus Christ is **Lord**. He's **my** Lord, he's **your** Lord if you believe he paid the price of your salvation. Paul says, *'If you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'* Romans 10:9. But we must never forget that he is Lord. Full stop. Jesus Christ is Lord. He is Lord of the universe, he is Lord of **everything** and **everybody**. The whole **world** belongs to the Lord. The risen Jesus is the exalted Lord of all. That's why the believers in the first century could be so bold in proclaiming the gospel because they really **believed** that Jesus is Lord of all. We **mustn't** restrict his Lordship.

The world doesn't recognise it yet, but one day it **will**. The process has already started – the risen Jesus is Lord, and some acknowledge this **already**, but Jesus is in the process of bringing **everything** under his rule. The day is coming when Jesus final victory will be secured.

The Lord and creator speaks in Isaiah's prophecy and says, *'Before me every knee will bow.'* Isaiah 45:23. And that is echoed here, *'at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,'* There will come a day when all will show the ultimate act of submission of bowing before the Lord and creator; **all creation** will honour Jesus by falling on their knees before him, **recognising** him as Lord and King.

The full extent of this submission is shown in '*every knee*', **all** will bow. And this is further stressed by adding *'in heaven and on earth and under the earth.'* There will be **no exceptions** on that day – everyone and everything will kneel in submission before him.

There will also be **verbal** acknowledgement of Jesus' Lordship, everyone will confess with their mouths that Jesus Christ is Lord. At the moment people have a **choice** whether to call Jesus Lord or not, but on that final judgement day, there will be **no** choice. **Everyone** will see that Jesus is Lord.

Of course this will be a **dreadful** day for unbelievers, because they will see that they have lived a life rejecting God's true way and they will be condemned to **continuing** their lives apart from God for eternity in a dreadful place. They will recognise what God has done for them in Jesus, but **too late**. They certainly **won't** enjoy bowing before their Lord and Maker.

But believers should be filled with great **hope** and **joy**. It should give us great assurance because Jesus is **risen**, Jesus is **exalted**, Jesus is **Lord of all**, Jesus is my Lord and **nothing** can stop me from knowing his Lordship for ever. Paul says in his letter to the Colossians, *'For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.'* Colossians 1:13.

Those early Christians met together to share their lives together. Everything they knew and experienced, their encouragements and discouragements, every aspect of their lives as believers, everything they knew of their Lord, all the things they were encouraged to do to remember him, their songs and their prayers, their discussions about God's word, their whole existence was based upon the truths within this hymn: Jesus left his majesty in heaven to be born as a man, so that he could serve his beloved creation – man – ultimately in his obedience to death on a cross, but then to rise again and be exalted as Lord of all. **These** are the truths that they held so dear – these are the truths that we hold dear and proclaim. Jesus is **risen** and **Lord of all**.

[Sing 'Glory to Jesus']