

Memorial Day 2021

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, May 30, 2021

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

KEY 1 – Memorial Day is once again upon us! It should be noted that Memorial Day is more than an opportunity to enjoy a three-day weekend. Rather, it affords us the occasion to consider and commemorate the sacrifice of more than 1.3 million men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation. Thus said, I do hope that you will avail yourselves of the opportunity to participate in local town proceedings. In fact, at the conclusion of this message I will invite Ron Phelps to touch upon this and more. Ultimately...

KEY 2 – Memorial Day should matter to us as Americans. Perhaps it should matter even more so as Christians. Why? Because the themes of selflessness and sacrifice are at the heart of Christian faith and practice. Such elements are foundational to our belief system, being addressed by virtually every book of the Bible! Perhaps no book of the Bible touches upon these themes as powerfully as the Book of Philippians (NT). This morning, I have chosen to explore this epistle (i.e., the letter of Paul to the ancient church at Philippi).

Let' us delve in...

PHILIPPIANS 2 PT. 1

In many ways, the “center of gravity” for this inspired work is found in its second chapter. In Philippians 2:5–11, the apostle Paul details the story of Jesus incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection and exaltation in a highly poetic manner. This is a portion of Scripture we have touched upon time-and-again, yet it shall serve as the foundation for our study today...

Philippians 2:5–11 (NIV)

- 5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
- 6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
- 7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
- 8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
- 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
- 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

QUOTE – “This passage is rich with echoes of Old Testament texts, specifically the story of Adam’s rebellion in Genesis 3 and the poems of the ‘Suffering Servant’ in the Book of Isaiah. This poem is worth committing to memory, as it is a beautifully condensed version of the Gospel story. Before becoming human, the Messiah pre-existed in a state of glory and equality with God. Unlike Adam, who tried to seize equality with God, the Messiah chose not to exploit his equal status for His self-advantage. Rather, He emptied Himself of status. He became human. He became a servant to all. And, even more than that, He allowed Himself to be humiliated. He was obedient to the Father by going to His death on a Roman execution rack. But, through God’s power and grace, the Messiah’s shameful death was reversed through the Resurrection. And now, God has highly exalted Jesus as the King of all, bestowing upon Him the Name that is above all names, so that all creation should recognize that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” –Tim Mackie

PHILIPPIANS 2 PT. 2

To be clear, the apostle Paul is not recounting the story of Jesus humility, sacrifice and subsequent exaltation for the mere purpose of retelling it (though this would not be time wasted). Rather, Paul is putting forth the pattern of Jesus’ life as an example that we are to aspire to and mimic in our own lives...

Philippians 2:5–11

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus . . .

KEY – Herein, Paul offers us the invitation to participate in the story of Jesus’ life, as we are called to share in His humility, selflessness and sacrifice, trusting in the One who brings elevation and exaltation in kind (i.e., for His own glory). The rest of this work elaborates upon and explores these overarching themes—themes which feel particularly relevant on this Memorial Day! In an age of prideful self-absorption and selfishness, can we honestly hear too much about humility and selfless sacrifice?

PAUL PT. 1

To begin, Paul “personally” sought to live after the humble, selfless and sacrificial example of Jesus Christ. This becomes quite evident in the sections wherein he addresses his own life-circumstances and ministry before the Lord (i.e., starting in the opening chapter).

NOTE 1 – Broadly speaking, Paul wrote this letter to address the concerns the church at Philippi had for him. After all, he was imprisoned at the time of this writing, and Roman imprisonment was by no means the most pleasant of circumstances! The Philippians had every earthly right to be worried about their friend and spiritual father, but Paul notes that this period has actually turned out for good...

NOTE 2 – Paul establishes that this season of imprisonment has given him opportunity to share the gospel message with Roman guards and administrators (i.e., guards and administrators who knew Paul was jailed for his faith in Christ). Moreover, his imprisonment served to inspire confidence in other Christians to proclaim Jesus more freely. As Paul shares...

Philippians 1:12–14

12 . . . I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

NOTE 3 – Continuing on, Paul adds he is optimistic that he will soon be released, though he admits the possibility he may well be executed for his faith. Interestingly, he prefers death in Christ to ongoing service! For Paul, his present and future life are defined by the life and love of Jesus for him. If he dies, he will meet the Lord in glory (which is better for HIM). If he is released, that would mean more time and opportunity to advance the kingdom and strengthen the Church (which is better for OTHERS)—so this is what he ultimately hopes for...

Philippians 1:19–25

19 . . . I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith . . .

KEY – Notice the mindset of the apostle Paul herein. Dying for Jesus is not a sacrifice for Paul! Rather, it is staying alive to serve others. That is Paul's way of participating in the example and story of Jesus' humility, selflessness and sacrifice: i.e., to love and prefer others more than himself.

PAUL PT. 2

These themes are also evident in the third chapter of this work. As we turn to chapter 3, Paul addresses, once again, the danger of false teachers who sought to supplant the message of grace in Christ with a religion of works and ritual (cf. Galatians).

FYI 1 – In some ways Paul sees something of himself in these figures. After all, he was once a fierce persecutor of the church, maintaining salvation by works and not grace through faith. There was a time when Paul placed his confidence in "himself" (e.g., his own abilities, capacities and accolades), but like Jesus (cf. Phil. 2) he had abandoned self-exaltation and elements associated with personal privilege or status...

FYI 2 – In fact, Paul has come to see his former strengths, virtues and honors as filth (i.e., "dung"), preferring now to become a servant like Jesus—participating in His suffering and sacrificial love. Paul does this in the hope that Jesus' love will one day carry him through death to a glorious resurrection...

Philippians 3:4b–11

4 . . . If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. 7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage [i.e., filth; dung], that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in[a] Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

KEY – For Paul, life is found in participating in the story of Jesus' life—not in self-absorption and per. elevation!

PAUL PT. 3

Paul's dedication to participate in the example of Jesus Christ is lastly evident in the final chapter of this work.

NOTE – In chapter 4, Paul takes the time to thank the Philippians for the sacrificial gift they had offered (i.e., to bless him in prison and meet his practical needs). However, Paul wanted the Philippian believers to know that his imprisonment, poverty, etc., were not true hardships for him. In fact, they had become his greatest teachers, showing him that no matter the circumstance, the secret to “contentment” is dependence upon the Christ who offers strength...

Philippians 4:10–13

10 I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

KEY – Paul came to see personal suffering and challenge as an opportunity to reenact the story of Jesus Christ!

TIMOTHY & EPAPHRODITUS

Clearly, Paul challenged himself to live after the pattern of Jesus' humility, selflessness and sacrifice. Moreover, we see Paul commend this type of life in the figures of Timothy and Epaphroditus. Following the “center of gravity” of Philippians 2:5–11, Paul goes on to identify two men worthy of commendation: Timothy (his son in the faith and protégé) and Epaphroditus (the envoy who brought the gift of the Philippians to Paul in prison)...

1) Paul notes that **Timothy** is like Christ, being concerned for the “well-being” of others more than himself...

Philippians 2:19–23

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. 20 I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. 23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.

2) Paul notes the willingness of **Epaphroditus** to serve Paul and risk his life (i.e., emblematic of Jesus Christ)...

Philippians 2:25–30a

25 . . . I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. 26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. 29 So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ.

KEY – Paul sees these men as venerable men given to the “reenactment” of the story of Jesus' life and service!

THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI

Paul challenged himself to live after the pattern of Jesus' humility, selflessness and sacrifice. Paul commended Timothy and Epaphroditus for their dedication to the pattern of Jesus' humility, selflessness and sacrifice. Ultimately, Paul commands the church at Philippi to aspire to this example as well...

NOTE – In chapter 4 we see Paul call the people to live out the Jesus story in daily life and living. Specifically, he addresses two women in the church who had apparently worked alongside him beforehand. Despite their common faith and shared ministry experience, they were in some kind of conflict. Thus, Paul pleaded with them to follow the example of Jesus' humility and reconcile, that they might find unity...

Philippians 4:1–3 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! 2 I plead with **Euodia** and I plead with **Syntyche** to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

KEY – Much of the stubbornness and resentment that fuels endless conflict is rooted in pride, selfishness and self-promotion! Thus said, scriptural humility, selflessness and sacrifice are the antidote to the cancer of broken relationships (i.e., whether it be Euodia and Syntyche centuries ago or you and me in the modern age). We can only wonder...

Q. Did Euodia and Syntyche relent and reconcile per the command(s) of Paul? We simply do not know.

Q. Will we recognize the need for Christ-like humility, selflessness and service? That remains to be seen.

SUMMATIONS

Paul saw something wondrous in the example of Jesus' incarnation, life, service, death and corresponding elevation—something worthy of aspiration and sincere imitation. Paul had given himself to the task of reenacting the story of Jesus' life. Paul lauded such living in the lives of his peers, Timothy and Epaphroditus. Paul had commanded the ancient Philippians (e.g., Euodia and Syntyche) to pursue lives characterized by such Christ-like virtues...

KEY – And in every nation and age his commandment rings forth today...

Philippians 2:5–9 (NIV)

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

- 6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
- 7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
- 8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

CONCLUSION

On this Memorial Day weekend, wherein we commemorate the brave men and women who gave their lives for our nation, please commemorate and emulate the Christ who gave up everything for you and for me. Thank you for joining us today. If you wish to give online, feel free to do so at www.NewLifeBarre.org. If you wish to give in person there are offering boxes throughout the church facility...

Numbers 6:24–26

24 ““The Lord bless you

and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you

and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you

and give you peace.””

KEY – At this time I would like to welcome Ron Phelps to share and close out our service...