

Preview Sermon #2: Philippians 2:1–11

He is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Please pray with me:

Father,

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Equip these saints through the preaching of your word so that they would love one another and work hard together for the faith of the gospel.

In the name of the risen King, Jesus, Amen!

Last week, we held our covenanting service. There, we agreed to covenant together as one body called Risen King Church. These members have agreed that Aric Burch, James Alexander, and myself should be their pastors; we have affirmed that we believe the standard of teaching in our member affirmation of faith; we have ratified Risen King Church's bylaws. That happened last week. Two weeks ago, I preached from Philippians 1:27–30 as the first of two foundation stones for Risen King Church. Namely, that we believe that both faith and suffering are gifts from God. And this conviction produces a fearless people who work hard together for the faith of the gospel. This morning, I am preaching a second sermon from Philippians: The Mind of Christian Charity from Philippians 2:1–11. Please turn there in your Bibles and read along with me, starting in verse 1.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God!

The apostle Paul is in prison as he writes this letter to the church in Philippi. Since Christ confronted and saved him on the road to Damascus, Paul's life has been filled with great pains and trials and suffering. I just finished reading through the book of Acts in my personal reading—every other scene in the second half of the book is Paul in trouble, Paul suffering. Starvation at sea, shipwreck, relentless pursuit by his enemies, snake bite, beatings, imprisonment, unfair trials. He has endured much, and still he suffers in prison, probably in Rome. You can imagine being in the Philippian believers' shoes: This is the church that Paul established in Acts 16 when he met Lydia and he and Silas were thrown in jail, and God broke them out of prison with a great earthquake, and the jailer almost killed himself, but was instead saved along with his household. This church has done well, and they have continued to support Paul in his ministry and his sufferings. These Philippian believers *love* Paul, and he is still experiencing hardship. So when Paul tells them how they can “complete his joy”, they are eager to oblige. That's the very thing they want to do! Imagine their concern for Paul, their desire to help him in his imprisonment and their inability to do much from so far away. And now he tells them how they can complete his joy: Yes! We're ready! What do you need from us?!

Well, he says, “if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy” And there is! He doesn't actually wonder if there is any encouragement in Christ. Of course there is! Therefore, complete my joy... How? By “being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

You want to complete my joy? Paul asks. Then share the same mind, the same soul, the same love. Count others more valuable or significant than yourself. That's the gist of verses 1–4. It is a straightforward command: **Be humble and look out for the interests of others above your own.** My guess is that no one here is surprised to find such a command in the Bible. This isn't controversial. By and large, we all know **that** we're supposed to be humble and unselfish in this way, and we often know how. We can think of ways to obey this command practically with the people around us. But it isn't easy to actually obey a command like this. Why would I want to put others before myself? In any given situation, *I want what I want*. Why should I lay that aside for what *you* want? What would motivate me to humbly look out for the interests of others above my own?

Verses 5–11 supply the motive for this unselfishness and unity. It strikes right at the heart of what we want for Risen King Church: Yes, we want to be of the same mind, to have the same love and to be in full accord. We want humility, not selfish ambition, to rule us. We love the idea of being the sort of people who count others more significant than ourselves. But what is the motive power for this attitude? What's the basis for it? That is what we are focused on for the remainder of this sermon: The

basis for our unified, humble Christian charity. It has two facets. The first is Christ our Forerunner. The second is Christ our King.

Look back at verse 4. Read it again with me: 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have **this mind** among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

Paul commands us to have *this* mind. What mind is he talking about? Well, it's a mind that is humble, that counts others more significant than self, and that results in true unity and brotherhood with the saints—we get that from verses 1–4. *And*, it is the mind that Christ had when he chose to humble and empty himself rather than clinging to his equality with God.

“Have this mind among yourselves, [now listen!] *which is yours in Christ Jesus*”. What does that mean? Do you see that this is the all-important question for this passage: **What does Paul mean when he says that this mind is ours in Christ Jesus?** We all know that we **should** have an attitude of Christian charity toward others. We all know that we should not be greedy or selfish—that we should prioritize the interests of others above our own. But how do we get such an attitude, such a mind? Right here in verse 5, Paul doesn't only say that we *should* have this attitude, but that such an attitude of Christian charity *belongs to us in Christ Jesus*. What does that mean? This is the basis for our unified, humble Christian charity, and like I said before, it has two facets: Christ our Forerunner, and Christ our King. Let's look at them both in turn.

Read verse 6 again with me, and notice that the rest of our passage (verse 6–11) is all one, long description of Jesus Christ: “Christ Jesus, **who** . . .”

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 **who**, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Make sure you see this connection: That description of Jesus starting in verse 6 is Paul's explanation of the nature of Christian charity and how Jesus gives us the mind of Christian charity. It's like me saying, “I learned spiritual discipline from my father, who was up before me every morning reading his Bible.” That description of my father tells you what I mean by “spiritual discipline” and how my father taught it to me.

Verses 6–11 is working in exactly the same way.

First, the mind of Christian charity is ours in Christ in the sense that he is our Forerunner who has paved the way before us. We see the glorious Son of God who is preeminent, the Word of God,

Governor and Sustainer of all things, upholding the universe by the word of his power; very God of very God, begotten of the Father, not made; infinite, eternal, full and not needy in any respect. And this almighty, glorious Being *emptied* himself, not by becoming any less God, but by taking on a human nature. This is great humility, that the Creator would take on the form, the nature, the flesh of a creature. But the humility of Jesus did not stop there: he humbled himself still further by becoming obedient to the point of death, and not just any death—it would have been humiliation enough for the eternal God to subject himself in his human nature to the death of old age or sickness or some other breaking down of the body. But Jesus died the death of traitors and thieves and murderers—a death reserved for the lowest, cruelest, most deplorable and contemptible members of humanity. Jesus humbled himself to death *on a cross*.

The argument is one of greater to lesser. If God humbled himself, so should we, who are infinitely lower in terms of glory and honor. Paul does not end with Christ's humiliation, however. He continues in verse 9: Therefore [that is, because Jesus humbled himself to die on a cross, *Therefore*] God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ humbled himself *with his exaltation in mind*. He endured the cross "*for the joy set before him*" (Heb 2:2). We have this mind that is humble, charitable, not self-interested, not greedy *in* Christ Jesus. That is, because God has exalted Jesus, so will he exalt us in him. We look to Christ's example and the fact that he has gone before us as a forerunner and it gives us certain hope that we will follow in his same path: We follow him down into humiliation and death, *and* we follow him out of death into new life and glory. Therefore, Christian charity is possible because we are confident that even if we don't get our way, even if others despise or embarrass us, even if we don't insist on our own rights and it comes back to bite us—someone takes advantage of our kindness—even then, we know that we follow Christ through his humiliation to his exaltation. If it is true for him, it will be true for us. That is the first way that this mind of Christian charity is ours in Christ Jesus: through his example and running before us. Let me give a concrete example before we move on to the second facet:

You might become the object of unfair criticism. A fellow church member critiques your parenting too harshly and without sufficient understanding; a brother takes you to task for a large purchase that you and your wife have prayed earnestly about; a sister catches a piece of a conversation and takes aim at your character before asking any questions about what was really going on. How will you be able to respond like a Christian in that moment? Well, part of it comes down to this: I follow my Savior, Jesus. He is my Forerunner. No one has ever been critiqued more unfairly than him. He was reviled and did not revile in return. Instead, he kept his eyes fixed on the joy set before him, and he was exalted. And not only that, but he purchased justification and resurrection and glorification for all who follow him.

Therefore, I will be exalted in him. Don't miss this: To say that Christ is our Forerunner is more than saying he is our Example. Yes, we imitate Christ. But he also *purchased* this hope of exaltation for us. On the last day, I will be justified in Christ, raised up in Christ, made glorious in Christ. Every criticism, fair or not, will slough off and turn to dust. Therefore, I can humbly receive criticism, taking the fair bits to heart, and not getting bent out of shape over the unfair parts. This is Christian charity in action, humbly counting others more significant than ourselves, maintaining one mind, one spirit, one love, and putting away selfish ambition and conceit.

The basis for our Christian charity is Christ our Forerunner.

Second, the basis for our Christian charity is Christ our King. Read verses 9–11 again:

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Whose name is underneath the name of Jesus? Whose knee will bow to the risen Christ? Whose tongue will confess that he is Lord? Mine! *Yours!* Though we share in the exaltation of Christ—we are raised up *with him*—he is nevertheless exalted *above us*. He is infinitely more glorious than you or me. The end of all things is God the Father glorified in his exalted Son, to whom *every* knee bows and *every* tongue confesses: He is Lord!

Jesus reigns over all! He rules over **you**. And because Jesus reigns, therefore . . .

1. We don't (at least not ultimately). The universe does not revolve around you. Jesus will grant to the one who conquers to sit down with him on *his* throne, sure enough (Rev 3:21). We will reign with Christ (Rev 20:4). But make no mistake: Jesus is peerless. We will cast our glory—our crowns—down at the feet of Jesus. We will be members of the vast multitude of saints who fall on their faces around the throne to worship the living God! Our tongues will confess Jesus as Lord. Our knees will bow in humility and awe. *All* glory and honor and power belongs to *him*. In the end, the Son is exalted and the Father is glorified. In the end, we are the confessing, bowing worshipers. Therefore, you can have all the ambition in the world, all of the talent and charisma, you can build great things and gain influence or social capital. You can impress people with your clever turns of phrase or your business acumen. You can gain a great reputation in your community and work yourself into a position at work or at home where others defer to you, wait upon you, honor you, obey you. None of it will change the telos of history: God the Father glorified, Jesus exalted, and you, on your face bowing while your tongue cannot stop confessing: "Jesus, he is Lord!" **Because Jesus reigns, therefore, we don't.**

2. Because Jesus reigns, therefore, our future is secure. This cursed world has limited resources. It is full of dishonest, sinful men and an adversary who is always looking to steal, kill, and destroy. And it is coupled with our own sinful, unbelieving hearts. As a result, the temptation to vie (to fight) for power,

wealth, and attention is real. But if Jesus reigns, then our future is secure and well-defined. What would you hope for if Jesus did *not* reign? There is nothing *to* hope for, nothing concrete. Nothing certain. You might decide to make the best of it, or to grab as much as possible before it's gone, or to enjoy life as much as possible if all you have is today. I think this is a big part of the reason why "manifesting" and "karmic energy" are popular ideas in our day. Manifesting puts control of the future into your hands: If I can focus my thoughts, think positively, and imagine my goals coming true, then they will—that's manifesting. Or, if I put out enough good energy into the universe, I will get good energy back—that's karma. Both of those ideas are useless. They're false, so they don't ultimately deliver on their promises. And they're vague. They don't give a certain hope. They don't secure your future, nor define it. But because Christ reigns, the believer's future is secure and well-defined: A river flowing with life-giving water. Trees laden with fruit empowered to heal the nations. God dwelling with us as our light. Everything we need supplied, our tears wiped away, and our souls satisfied! A great marriage feast with Christ our Bridegroom. Jesus exalted, all of the saints worshipping, serving, working, not toiling, as citizens of his kingdom. Our future is secure. And it is well-defined. We are, in the end, worshipers and servants of the King, and he is, in the end, exalted in glory over all creation, including us.

Now, I'm arguing that this reality that Christ is our King is the basis for our Christian charity—our love for one another that humbly puts self-interest below the interests of others. I've just made two points: The fact that Christ reigns means that we don't, and it means that our future is secure. How does that framework serve as a basis for Christian humble love?

At first glance, you might think that this framework actually destroys ambition altogether. You could draw that conclusion because (1) we don't have to secure our own future, it is already secured, and (2) Jesus will ultimately get all the power and glory, not us. But it doesn't destroy ambition. Instead, it transforms ambition and makes it Christian. Here's why: Selfish ambition and vain conceit are oriented around how much power you wield, how much pleasure you enjoy, how much influence and legacy you build. Worldly ambition is a pack of wild dogs tearing at a carcass. They bite and snarl at one another and only come together long enough to tear off what they want. Then, they run off with their spoils, each in its own direction. But Christian ambition is a team of sled dogs: They are joined together, running hard in the same direction, all aimed by the musher at the same goal. They haven't lost their zeal to run. But their skill, ambition, and zeal have all been caught up into the mission of the musher who leads them.

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit," Paul says, "But in humility count others more significant than yourselves." This mind is *yours* in Christ. How? If Jesus is the focal point of all of life, if the end goal, which is as sure as anything, is Jesus exalted on his throne, with thousands worshipping

him, then our interests and ambitions are oriented around him and, as a result, shared with one another. That is, all of us are about the business of bringing all of life into glad submission to Christ. We are no longer driven by an individual ambition, but by a shared ambition. Namely, **we want to cultivate a world fit for his rule as we spread the aroma of Christ everywhere.** Our desire is that many more sinners would bow and confess gladly as citizens of his great kingdom. We long for all of the Chippewa Valley to joyfully bow the knee to Christ, and then to live all of life in preparation for the day of Christ, when he will judge and we will see all things in subjection to him.

If we are a team of sled dogs, pulling hard in one direction, the finish line is this: the glory of Christ as his sanctified, mature people—all of you, brothers and sisters!—gather around his throne to sing his praises. That's what we're after—together.

Therefore, the kingship of Jesus is the basis for our Christian charity (love). I am tied to you, brothers and sisters, and you to me. Christ will one day be glorified in the praises of his people. I want you, your families, your great-great-grandchildren, your neighbors to make it all the way to that glory, and I want this land to be fit for his coming. When you flourish in Christ, it is my success. And when I flourish along with my family, it is your success.

The kingship of Jesus does not destroy our ambition. The exaltation of Christ doesn't melt all of our priorities and family ties into one, colorless pudding. We retain our individuality and our own responsibilities. But his exaltation does bind us together as fellow citizens with a common goal and a shared vision for the future: Soon and very soon, every knee and every tongue, including ours, will submit completely to Christ. Oh, that many would do it gladly!

Let's make this concrete: We want the Chippewa Valley to be won for Christ, to become a Christian stronghold in the upper Midwest, so that when Christ comes, this land resounds with glad shouts of praise! What does such a goal entail practically?

1. This goal is ambitious and comprehensive, and it will take time. Therefore, it is a multi-generational goal.
2. It is also family-oriented, because that is how God designed the world: Healthy culture begins with Christian families who worship God and pursue holiness in faith. Christian businesses are built by families. Good civil government, especially Christian civil government, relies upon families who are zealous to raise up the next generation in the fear and admonition of the Lord. King Jesus ties us together and joins our ambitions so that we are pulling together with all our might toward the glory and praise of God. That is a multi-generational goal that is family-oriented. Therefore, I have a great interest in each of your families. The Chippewa

Valley needs big, healthy, faithful, joy-filled, Christian households. My ambition—our shared ambition—to cultivate a land ready to welcome her risen King means that I want your marriages to flourish. I want the younger couples to have lots of babies. And I want your children to receive a Christian enculturation, your businesses to grow so that you can provide well for your families and extend generational blessing to your children's children. In our day especially, such an ambition means that I want the Chippewa Valley, I want Mondovi, to be livable. I want it to be easy for my children and grandchildren to remain here because they can find work, affordable housing, and a healthy, faithful church so that they can jump into the work of the kingdom in this community. And I don't want that just for myself, though I love the idea of my children staying close. God may call them to go far and wide. But by God's grace, as we strive together for the faith of the gospel, and if God chooses to bless those efforts so that Mondovi becomes a Christian stronghold, then such a community will be a tremendous blessing to encourage and equip our children's children, and they will be a blessing in return as they bring their gifts to bear on the life of the church.

3. This goal means that we are invested in the futures of young Christian men. First and foremost, I want them to repent and believe on Christ if they haven't already. Then, I want them to grow in their sober-mindedness and strength, in their competence and knowledge of the word, so that they are thoroughly equipped to lead their future wives, educate and disciple their future children, build up future Christian businesses, and step into community leadership roles. I am likewise invested in the young Christian women of our church, that they would be thoroughly equipped to love their husbands and children, cultivating and beautifying their households, self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands (Tit 2:4-5). I am invested in the sobriety and maturation of older saints that they would be thoroughly equipped to train up and exhort the younger saints, and that they would be ready to stand before their great Savior and Judge. And my investment—our investment in one another—extends beyond theological instruction and exhortation. It has to do also with down-to-earth skills, jobs and apprenticeships, financial investments, home ownership, physical fitness, good home cooking and hospitality, Psalm singing, and reliable cars.

Don't miss what I'm saying: The reign of Jesus means that your ambition *can be godly*. Ambition certainly can be motivated by selfishness and conceit. But God has exalted Jesus so that the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (Rev 11:15). Therefore, if your ambition to grow a big family, start a business, progress through the ranks in your company, or buy a plot of land is pointed dead center toward Christ and his kingdom, then your ambition will glorify God and bless your neighbor. Therefore, you can run *hard*. Run with joy. Run so as to win the prize!

Jesus reigns, and therefore, we are dead set on the goal that all of the Chippewa Valley would bow the knee in glad submission to the risen King. Our ambitions are not destroyed or weakened, but they are no longer selfish. They are joined so that we are of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. The kingship of Christ cuts the legs out from underneath our selfish ambition and vain conceit and compels us to consider the needs and interests of others. The basis for our Christian charity is Christ our King.

Therefore, church, follow Christ your Forerunner, who has purchased the sure hope of exaltation for you, by counting your brothers and sisters more significant than yourselves, not demanding your rights, but looking to future glory in him. All the while, turn your ambition, joined to the ambitions of your fellow saints, to the Day of Christ, when every knee will bow to him, and every tongue will confess that he is Lord to the glory of God.

Pray with me.

Father, may our ambition be neither selfish nor conceited. But give Risen King Church the grace to look to Christ, submitting to him as our King, and then to run hard, pulling together for the glory of his name.

Amen!