

Knowing Jesus Fully

Press On Series, October 10/11 | Philippians 2:1-11

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THE PILGRIMS' QUEST SHAPES THE WAY AMERICANS THINK.

This year is the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock.

Their story is probably familiar to you.

England was a turbulent place at the time, and much of the turmoil had to do with religion.

In the early 1600s, a group of people who wanted to purify the Church of England in big ways separated from the official church, a move that was illegal at the time.

Fleeing persecution, they settled in the Netherlands where they enjoyed religious toleration.

Life in the Netherlands was comparatively good. However, the high cost of living made building a life difficult, and some of the Separatists were concerned that their children were not growing up English. Consequently, they laid plans to head to a new life in the New World.

The group chartered two boats, the *Mayflower* and the *Speedwell* for the journey. However, the *Speedwell* proved to be unseaworthy and was forced to return to port.

Around 100 people made the difficult voyage, including three dozen Separatists.

However, in November 1620, the *Mayflower* reached Cape Cod with around 100 passengers.¹

They signed the *Mayflower Compact* as a charter to guide their life together.²

By the end of December, they came ashore and began building the Plymouth Colony.

They endured a hard winter, disease ravaged the group, and they faced severe shortages. However, the colony survived and celebrated the next year's harvest.

It's not clear what their place was in history for two hundred years.

After 1630, the nearby Massachusetts Bay Colony eclipsed the Plymouth Colony.

By comparison, Plymouth struggled economically.

By 1700, it had been absorbed into Massachusetts.

However, Daniel Webster cemented their place in history in 1820.

The United States went through rough days and many crises following the Revolution.

So in 1820, as the bicentennial of the Plymouth Colony's founding approached, it seemed like a fitting time and place to cast a new vision for the country.

The famous orator, Daniel Webster, was chosen for the assignment.

He gave the speech before a large crowd in Plymouth.

In it, Webster praised our "Pilgrim Fathers."

Afterward, his speech was published and read widely. Since that day, the Pilgrims' quest has shaped the way we think about ourselves as Americans. In some ways, we look at ourselves as their descendants. Their way of thinking has shaped our way of thinking.

Another powerful set of events shaped the way the people of Philippi thought in Paul's day.

OCTAVIAN'S VICTORY SHAPED THOUGHT IN PHILIPPI.

Octavian was an ambitious Roman leader who succeeded Julius Caesar.

Julius Caesar was a controversial Roman leader who ruled as a dictator.

Those who valued the Roman Republic plotted against him and assassinated him.

The leaders of the Republican revolt against Julius Caesar included Brutus and Cassius, who assassinated Julius Caesar.

Brutus and Cassius were forced out of Rome after the assassination of Julius Caesar. They ended up in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire, gathering their forces.

Back in Rome, Octavian and Mark Antony began to consolidate their power.

Octavian was the politician and the man Julius Caesar had named in his will as his heir. Mark Antony was the military genius. They gathered their forces to go after Caesar's assassins.

The battles that cemented Octavian's power put Philippi on the map in 42 BC.

Brutus and Cassius eventually made their stand outside of Philippi with nearly 100,000 troops.

Mark Antony and Octavian set up camp against them with their 100,000 troops.

There were two massive battles, the largest ever to pit Romans against Romans.

At the end, Mark Antony and Octavian won.

Mark Antony headed east to consolidate his own power.

Octavian returned to Rome and began building his power.

From Rome, Octavian reorganized Philippi as a Roman colony to celebrate his victory.

Before he came to power, Philippi was a relatively unimportant place in Macedonia.

However, Philippi was located on a spring-fed fertile plain. It was a great place to grow things.

Octavian resettled many of the soldiers from the big battle in Philippi and granted them lands.

He reorganized the city as a Roman colony.

That meant that it was really a "Rome in miniature."

The citizens of Philippi became Roman citizens, with all the rights and privileges they would have if they had been born on and lived on Italian soil.

They were exempt from certain taxes as well.

Octavian made a bunch of people wealthy as a result.

He did it again after the Battle of Actium.

I mentioned that Mark Antony had headed east to consolidate his power.

With no one left to fight together, Mark Antony and Octavian ended up in a power struggle with each other.

Their fight came to a head in a great naval battle at Actium, once again in Greece.

Octavian's navy soundly defeated Mark Antony's.

Octavian offered many of Mark Antony's former troops a generous retirement, settling them in and around Philippi. They built secure, prosperous lives for themselves.

Consequently, they were fiercely loyal to Octavian or—as he came to be known once he finally consolidated his power—Caesar Augustus.

Consequently, the people of Philippi became wildly patriotic Romans.

They hailed the Caesars as Savior and Lord!

Now let's turn our attention to what Paul wrote in Philippians chapter 2, when he boldly proclaimed instead that Jesus is Lord.

JESUS EMPTYING HIMSELF SHAPED THE WAY PAUL THOUGHT.

In Philippians 2:6, Paul showed us Jesus did not grasp after privilege. (form)

... who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped ...

First, to understand this verse, we need to see that Paul recognized that before any of this started, Jesus was already God.

John 1:1-2 explains it this way,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.

Paul wrote that Jesus was in the form of God. He meant that Jesus had all the essential characteristics of God. Jesus was God in every way that mattered.³

Plus, Paul didn't say that Jesus became God. Instead, Jesus being in the form of God is something that was before any of this began.

"Being in the form of God already," then, Jesus did not consider or count the equality that he had with God as something that he had to hold onto. He didn't have to grasp it to keep it.

Jesus let go of equality with God in favor of something better.

Instead, in Philippians 2:7-8, Paul showed us Jesus who emptied himself.

... 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.

Jesus specifically emptied himself in this: he was in the form of God, but he took on the form of a servant or slave. Again, that doesn't mean that he just took on the outer appearance of a slave or servant. Instead, he took on the essential characteristics of a servant.

He took on the outward characteristics (the likeness) of a human being. Now, he was human in every way. But it's important that in this case Jesus also looked like a human being.

Again, **John 1:14** explained,

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Then, Paul explained what Jesus did as a human. He extended his obedience to the point of death. Jesus didn't just die any death, however. Instead, he died torturously on the cross.

Jesus made it clear in **John 10:17-18** that it was his own decision and part of God's plan,

"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

Still, we need to pause here. This is an astounding claim! Jesus, eternal God himself, humbled himself. That's not what gods and kings typically do! But that's what Jesus did.

Getting that is critical to understanding what Paul is saying about who Jesus is!

Therefore, in Philippians 2:9, Paul showed us Jesus who was exalted by the Father.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name

...

If you're looking at this from the point of view of history, and if you're trying to get the flow of what happened, then you are missing out on Jesus' Resurrection and even his Ascension.

We move past the events themselves to understand what happened because of them.

Then **Matthew 28:18** we read that in the background something amazing and important had already happened. Jesus said so!

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

Clearly, in the background of history, earth-shattering changes had already happened.

Jesus was exalted but not just kind of exalted. Paul wrote that he was hyper-exalted.

Plus, in Philippians 2:10-11, Paul explained that Jesus is Lord.

... 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.

This passage is extremely evocative despite the distance of years and culture. We know what Paul meant! He wrote that every knee will bow at the name of Jesus. To bow that way means that we acknowledge with reverence the superiority and rule of a person.

Paul wrote that everyone, no matter where we are, will one day bow our knees before Jesus. That implies what other passages make clear that even those who have rejected Jesus will one day see that they were wrong, and that he is Lord, and that their choice has consequences.

In the same way, everyone will confess (say out loud and admit) that Jesus is Lord.

This is critical! Because this is the big name for us to apply to Jesus.

To apply the name "Lord" to Jesus is more than just a term of respect. It is to equate Jesus with God the Father. Hear **Isaiah 45:22-23** when the Lord God of Israel was proclaiming his superiority over all rivals he said,

"Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. 23 By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance."

Yahweh, the Lord God of Israel, had at one time said that every knee would bow to him and every tongue swear allegiance to him. Now the same thing is being said about Jesus. It could not be clearer that Jesus is God himself and in charge.

In **Revelation 5:13** we see prophesied a picture of the day when this statement will come about fully:

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all

that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

Jesus is Lord.

Jesus emptying himself shaped the way Paul thought.

This is the center of the book of Philippians.

More than that, this is the center of Paul's thinking about Jesus.

This is the picture Paul had of Jesus!

This picture that Paul had of Jesus shaped every other piece of his theology.

Can you see Jesus now, can you just glimpse him the way Paul did?

Can you see now how dramatic this picture is?

Can you see now how dramatically different this picture is from the one that shaped the worldview of most of the people of Philippi? Based on the victories of Octavian, they proclaimed boldly that "Caesar is lord!"

Paul responded back even more boldly, "No, Jesus and Jesus alone is Lord!" And this is what it looks like to be the true Lord!

This vision of Jesus shaped the way Paul thought.

Does this vision of Jesus shape the way you think?

THINKING LIKE JESUS SHOULD GUIDE THE WAY WE LIVE.

Philippians 2:5 reminds us that there was a reason why Paul shared his vision of Jesus.

Before launching into his profound picture of Jesus, Paul told the saints in Philippi why they needed to be reminded of it. He wrote,

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus ...

Paul wanted them to set their minds together in the way that Jesus's mind was set.

He wanted them to understand the way that Jesus thinks in order that they might be able to think in the same kind of way.

Paul wanted them to think like Jesus, because he wanted them to act out the implications!

What was so important?

Back in Philippians 2:1, Paul established the importance of his challenge with a rhetorical flourish.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy ...

Paul dictated this letter to Timothy.

At times, Paul could be very cerebral and make complex arguments.

However, right here Paul started preaching.

His words flowed with the cadence of a preacher who is building up to a point.

Phrase piles on top of phrase: "If there is any encouragement in Christ." Of course there is.

"If there is any comfort from love." Of course love is comforting, and we are people of love.

"If there is any participation in the Spirit." Well, of course, as followers of Jesus we all have the Holy Spirit in us powering and guiding us.

"If there is any affection and sympathy." Okay, this is where Paul pulled out the guilt card. "If you love me with the kind of gut-level love that I have with you, and if you remember all the pain I went through when I gave birth to you." Wait. Wrong letter. That's not what Paul wrote.

Except that it's pretty close to what he wrote. This is not a complex theological argument. It's old-fashioned arm twisting. What he was asking was critical to Paul.

Then in Philippians 2:2-4, he laid out his request in detail:

... 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 only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

After telling them how much joy he took in their partnership in the Gospel, in knowing that God's purposes were being fulfilled in his suffering, and in knowing that their prayers would lead to his continuing to fulfill his purpose, he wrote that one thing would make his joy complete in the fullest sense at last.

He wanted them to come together.

He wanted them to set aside selfish ambition and the kind of conceit that is based in deceit.

He wanted them to display a beautiful kind of humility that leads them to think of others first.

He wanted them to put one another's interests ahead of their own.

If they thought like Jesus, then this is how it would come out in their actions.

We'll say much more about the relationships that led Paul to make this statement next week.

For now, what I hope you see is that Paul expected that thinking like Jesus would guide the way that the saints in Philippi lived.

What he was asking was so counter to the culture in which they lived, but it was exactly the kind of thing that people whose thinking is shaped by Jesus would do.

DOES THINKING LIKE JESUS GUIDE THE WAY YOU LIVE?

The fervent patriotism Octavian's victories ignited in the citizens of Philippi guided their actions.

In the days after the Roman Republic fell, the Senate gradually affirmed the rule of the Caesars.

In one of the more significant steps, they proclaimed Julius Caesar as a god.

That made his adopted son—Caesar Augustus—the son of a god.

They attached divine titles to their Caesars, calling them "Savior" and "Lord."

They honored their Caesars in ways that looked almost like worship. It started small. They would proclaim oaths at public events. Eventually they offered prayers for and then to their Caesars. They even came to offer small sacrifices to the Caesars.

Christians would not proclaim Caesar as Savior and Lord. Instead, with Paul, they called Jesus alone Savior and Lord.

The patriotic citizens of Philippi who owed so much to the Caesars considered anyone who refused to honor Caesar a traitor.

And that's where thought turned to action for the citizens of Philippi.

They feared and despised Christians. They pressured them and ostracized them. They refused to do business with them, harassed them, and (at times) beat them. Eventually, they betrayed them, arrested them, tried them, and executed them.

The way they thought guided the way they lived.

The Pilgrims' quest has guided the way we Americans live.

Daniel Webster's *Plymouth Oration* reminded us of what we should see in their story which became cemented in the way we think about ourselves.

We have come to this Rock, to record here our homage for our Pilgrim Fathers; our sympathy in their sufferings; our gratitude for their labors; our admiration of their virtues; our veneration for their piety; and our attachment to those principles of civil and religious liberty, which they encountered the dangers of the ocean, the storms of heaven ... disease, exile, and famine, to enjoy and to establish. – Daniel Webster, *The Plymouth Oration*.

That way of thinking has shaped the way we live as Americans.

Since Pilgrims our Pilgrim Fathers, we have valued standing on our convictions no matter what the cost. And we still stand on our convictions at times whether anyone agrees with us or not!

We stand for freedom—particularly freedoms to speak, gather, and worship. Now we speak our minds, gather, and worship as we choose!

Like our Pilgrim ancestors, we work hard and believe a better life is possible. The hard work of the Pilgrims and their Puritan cousins became a work ethic that still drives us to work long hours, believing that we are working for something better.

We are people of buoyant faith. Even those of us who don't hold to religious kinds of faith always have a basic optimism that we are going somewhere.

Plus, we stand for democracy, everyone having a voice, and everyone doing their part. Which is why we get involved, speak our minds all over social media, and vote.

The Pilgrims' quest shaped the way we think in this country and the way we act.

You and I are supposed to think like Jesus.

What God wants should be our first thought.

Grasping after our rights and privileges should feel foreign and wrong.

Giving up our own interests should come naturally to us.

Serving should just make sense.

Going where the hurting can be found should become easy.

Humbling ourselves should be our way.

Standing united with each other would be our first choice.

We'd set aside selfish ambition without a thought.

We'd think of each other quickly and easily.

Paul said that when we truly grasp the nature of Jesus, this is what we'll see, and it will become the way we think.

Then thinking like Jesus should guide how we live.

Of course it should guide how we treat each other here within the church.

But it will also come out in how we deal with one another at home.

It will even change the way we act at work. And in traffic. And in the grocery store.

If we truly grasp what Paul wrote here, then we will think like Jesus, and thinking like Jesus will lead us to live like Jesus.

¹ <https://www.plimoth.org/learn/just-kids/homework-help/who-were-pilgrims> on 2020-10-08.

² <https://www.history.com/topics/colonial-america/pilgrims> on 2020-09-24.

³ Gordon Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 204.