

Group Study Outline

Launching

In what ways do we experience hardship because of our Christian faith?
When do we feel intimidated by any kind of opposition?

Questions

Paul has been encouraging us to a gospel-centred lifestyle. Now he describes the kind of mind-set/attitude that will motivate that living.

Read Philippians 2:5-11

Describe Jesus' journey from heaven to the cross (in 6-8): what was each costly, practical step he took as a result of his mind-set?

What did he do 'as God'?

What did he do 'as man'?

Why did he do this? (If necessary: 'yes, but why humble himself?')

Use phrases from 2:2-4 to describe what Jesus did.

(?) Read Isaiah 53:5-6 and ask: what purpose did this servant have?

In verse 5, Paul applies to us what Jesus did.

What is it about Jesus that we cannot copy?

What is it about Jesus that we are to copy?

How does personal comfort stop me working for others' salvation?

Am I frightened (cf 1:28)? what do I fear?

When do I feel that the gospel imperative has become unreasonable?

How does Paul wage that mind battle?

Re-read 2:9-11

What did God do to Jesus who'd so looked to the interests of others?

Read Isaiah 45:21-25

What name does God give to Jesus in Phil 2?

Why is this so remarkable?

How might this encourage opposed-and-suffering Christians?

for example ...

- if God has done this to Jesus, what does God think of what Jesus did?
- looking on to Phil 3:20-21, what will such an exalted Jesus do?
- if we really believed 2:9-11 how would that sustain us?

Conclusion

What mind-set does Paul want Christians to have?

How will Jesus' mind-set help me live the Christian life this week?

What is the normal Christian life, according to Paul?



Philippians 2:5-11

Theme Sentence

Have the same gospel mind-set as Jesus.

Story Board

Look at the attitude of Jesus: what motivated him?

Consider the way he left all his security and luxury in heaven for the sake of our salvation. He became a person on earth (and a despised and easily-overlooked person at that), and then he even gave up his own life (and in a particularly degrading way) ... why? Because he was more concerned for the salvation of people like us than for what made him comfortable!

God of course exalted him from that humiliation back to the position of supreme honour, to share his own glory and all this for the sake of his own glory. This is a great demonstration that Jesus' gospel-heartedness shows us exactly what God himself is like.

Application

2:5-11 is a favourite devotional passage for many Christians. But of course Paul's extremely challenging application is verse 5: Christians should have the same mind-set that led Jesus to do what he did.

- am I like Jesus? His others'-salvation-centred mind-set models the mind-set that we should have. His others'-salvation-centred living models what Paul is calling us to: this is what normal Christian living is like.
- how does my personal comfort stop me putting myself out in working for the salvation of others? At what point do I feel that the gospel imperative has become unreasonable? It's that mind battle that Paul is waging ...
- am I frightened (1:28)? If I let opposition stop me from gospel-heartedness, then that shows that I don't really believe 2:9-11. So I need to ask myself: is Jesus supreme now? is 3:20-21 true?

Verse by verse

5 The word translated *have this* mind is repeated in Philippians in 1:7; 2:2 (x2), 5; 3:15, 16, 19; 4:2, 10 (x2): it's a key theme that Christians think right. We can't do what Jesus did, but we can conform our mindset/attitudes to his likeness, as we *count /consider* others (2:3) just as Jesus did (using the same word of him in 2:6). The key question is why Jesus did what he did.

6-11 has had an enormous quantity of academic theological ink spilt over it! Without drowning in all that, let's try to discover Paul's purpose in using this possibly-already-existing Christian hymn.

The word *gospel* is used nine times in Philippians (more than any other epistle, except Romans which is four times as long!): the gospel is at the heart of Paul's reason for writing. The focus of the gospel is the Jesus of 2:6-11 – who he is, what he is like – as Paul calls on Philippian gospel-believers to live out the same gospel-centred mindset that drove Jesus (1:27; 2:5).

6-7 **As God, he ...**

In the form of God probably means something like 'sharing God's glory' (John 17:5; Heb 1:3). It wasn't that Jesus desired something that wasn't his, but that he did not regard this equality with God (which was already his) as something to be used for his own advantage. Not that he exchanged the form of God for the form of a slave, but that he manifested the form of God in the form of a slave. Not that he emptied himself of anything (eg his divine attributes) but that he poured himself out by taking on the form of a slave.

8 **As man, he ...**

Continuing to obey his Father's salvation plan, Jesus voluntarily put aside self-interest, entailing personal humiliation, suffering and death, in order that others are saved. Paul emphasises Jesus' death in 2:8, and in particular that this was by Roman execution, precisely because that is what the Philippians face.

This paragraph began back in 1:27-30. (This is the first of two long exhortation sections of the letter in 1:27-2:18 and 3:1-4:3 which each contain an example to follow [cf 2:5; 3:17]. Both sections have the application to *stand firm* [1:27; 4:1] with the *same mind* [2:2; 4:2].) We need to be told to *stand firm* since living in a way *worthy of the gospel* will invite opposition: it *has been granted* ('as a grace-gift') to *not only believe*, but also *suffer for the gospel* (1:29). Writing just three years before Nero's terrible persecution in 64AD, Paul is asking whether

these Philippian Christians will be *frightened* or *stand firm*, for gospel partners might face the kind of death Jesus experienced.

9-11 **So God ...**

We're told now about God's reaction to Jesus' attitude. Jesus receives divine approval, for his mindset is the mindset of heaven, an utterly appropriate revelation of what God is like.

So God gives to Jesus a status *higher*, not 'than he had before', but 'than anything else'. Paul takes language from Isaiah 45:23 (written about God) and applies it to Jesus. He received the name 'the LORD', God's own name from the OT, Yahweh (cf Isaiah 42:8 for the significance of God sharing his name). It is in honour of Jesus that everyone will now bow (cf John 5:23).

There is a contemporary relevance to this. Nero was also called 'Lord and Saviour' (cf Acts 25:26), but Christians are awaiting another *Lord and Saviour* (3:20). On the last day, Jesus will *subject all things to himself* and *every knee will bow*. What an encouragement to those gospel-minded Christians facing opposition now: the *crooked and depraved generation* (2:15) are certainly *destined for destruction* (1:28).

In 6-8, Jesus is not looking out for his own needs but for others (4). But we have to ask: what needs of others was Jesus looking out for? And it's clear that he did what he did for others' salvation: a gospel mind-set puts non-Christians' salvation ahead of personal comfort.

This confirms that Paul's concern in 2:1-4 is not humility towards other Christians in order to achieve unity. Paul describes Jesus looking out from the security of heaven, and coming to earth to experience contradiction, reproach and persecution ... and all for the sake of the salvation of those 'others' he saw out there.

But why are verses 9-11 here? It seems as if there was an issue in Philippi about 'suffering' and 'resurrection'. 3:10 puts these two themes together, but in a surprising order. The power of Christ's resurrection does not lift us out of suffering; rather, the new life in Christ puts the Christian exactly where Christ was. We can expect what he experienced if we have his mind-set (John 15:18-22). The cross is what a hostile world does to a faithful church; taking up the cross means not ducking out when the gospel becomes controversial.

So 2:9-11 shows that Jesus' current exaltation is not somehow contradicted when Christians *suffer for his sake* (1:29). Yes we are opposed, but it's because he now has the supreme position above all powers that we can be sure 1:28b remains true even in suffering: *destruction* and *salvation* are the only realities worth living for.