

Series: “‘Valuable’ Wisdom for a Church on the ‘Move’”

Sermon: “Attitude”

Text: Philippians 2:1-11

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- Take your shoes off. Today we walk on Holy Ground! I know all of God’s Word—all of Scripture is Holy—sanctified for His purposes. However, the verses we will consider today in *Philippians 2:1-11* have *always* held a very special place for me as one of the most important *living* truths God has recorded for my life and my part in the *missio dei*.
- They have helped me to remember my purpose in life at those times when I have lost my way. They are “burning bush,” ontological words for me. They tell me why I exist and why God, in his perfect plan, didn’t immediately take me to be with him when I trusted Jesus. Rather, He left me on this earth to walk, often haltingly and inconsistently, for his purposes, on this earth that is ultimately not my home.
- I burn from the proximity of the holiness of God every time I take time to re-consider these words and what they mean about me and what they say about the very nature of the unique, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent Trinitarian God we worship.
- If your job is communicating truth, you know that sometimes the best way to do it is by contrast. Sometimes, the things we contrast are polar opposites—180 degrees different. That is an easy way to illustrate a point.
- Other times the contrast happens less obviously by simply putting two things that appear to be very different alongside one another. One of my favorite long words, one I love to use whenever I can because I get so few natural opportunities, is the word, **“juxtaposition.”** When was the last time you were able to use the word “*juxtaposition*” when you were having a casual conversation?
- Today I plan to use *juxtaposition* to make my point. I think the contrast will be obvious from the first apparently silly moment of

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comparison. However, I hope the lesson comes later from the at least one commonality of the two things I now *juxtaposition*.

- Alongside one of, for me, the most holy passages of Scripture, the kenosis or the emptying of the Son of God in the incarnation I place the purpose for calling Fellowship Bible Church the “*pirate church*.”
- In some ways, the contrast seems so stark it is silly. On one hand, the holy, perfect, incarnate Son of God known for speaking absolute truth. On the other hand, grubby criminals known for their dishonesty and saying “*arrgh!*”
- You can keep this strange “*juxtaposition*” in mind for the next few minutes because I will come back to it. This sermon is already a success for me. I have been able to say “*juxtaposition*” five times!
- I have preached and taught Philippians 2:1-11 numerous times in different settings over the years we have been graciously gifted, by God as FBC, to gather together much as we are this morning.
- I will summarize much of what I think Scripture says here with only a few details to make sure we aren’t led astray in our understanding of what the Apostle Paul has recorded about one of the most, if not the most important parts of human history.
- God the Son becomes incarnate as a real human being and walks on the real earth in real time and space. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary, raised by a father named Joseph in relatively poor circumstances in a small, what we would call, middle-eastern village in the land of Israel—this Jesus of Nazareth is truly God the Son.
- I can’t think about this whole business of God-incarnate for very long without asking a number of “*how*” questions. As interesting as those questions may be, that is certainly not my purpose today except to make one foundational point as we begin.

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- I was not a great fan of WWJD bracelets (“What Would Jesus Do?”). There was nothing particularly wrong with them so if you had one, or still have one, that’s OK with me. Just not my thing. My main complaint was they asked me to decide how Jesus would act in a detailed situation and I was often not sure I could say.
- “I would think, *Jesus would know more about the truth of what is happening than I know right now, so Jesus would know what to do but I can’t be sure.*”
- However, when it comes to this passage in particular, the Apostle Paul tells me how Jesus would be. He doesn’t give me a WWJD description but rather a WWJBL (*What would Jesus be like*) as he walked around in the flesh. The Apostle gives me the **attitude** of Jesus.
- When God says, “*Be holy as I am holy,*” I tend to turn that into 1000’s of acts of holiness—or not—and I get lost in trying to make it happen. When Paul tells me that the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ wants me to have the same **ATTITUDE** he has I begin to sense the difference in trying to live by detailed laws versus living by grace. *More about that later.*
- I certainly do not always model my attitude after Jesus’s attitude but I sense there is a way I can follow his example in this even if I can’t seem to figure out all the details of every situation in life and know for sure the answer to WWJD? (What would Jesus do?)
- Because of this, *Philippians 2:1-11*, gives me a sense of how I am able to live without having all the perfect answers for every situation and choice.
- AND, of course, *Philippians 2:1-11*, does this in a context of a “good” church that knows it is on God’s mission together.

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- When a “good” church—one on God’s redemptive mission—faces *ambiguity* together because of testing *scarcity* brought on by change or sacrifice, they can have loving *discernment* that goes to the truth below the surface of only maintaining a façade of *unity* as they make *sacrifices* together for God’s mission.
- FBC is a “good” church in the sense of knowing we exist for the mission of God. As FBC, we are facing *ambiguity* together because of the “*scarcity*” (as we have been defining it) brought on by our choice to make a major move and do it in the midst of changing world circumstances.
- How will we have *discernment* that allows us to be *unified* as we walk through this *ambiguity* in this new *liminality* us? How will we do this as we are each asked to make the choice of sacrificing for God’s mission ahead? I am certain, we will all, in one way or another, be asked to do this sacrificing rather than tenaciously clinging to the past because of the comfort and sense of control that brings us?
- This train of thought is why we are looking at Paul’s letter to the Philippians once again and it is also a quick summary of the important words of wisdom we have considered so far.
- **How will we do it?** “Well, Raleigh, please just tell me the concrete details of the potential changes you and others have in mind for FBC and I’ll tell you if I will be unified with you or not. I need specifics to decide if I like them or not. You really can’t ask me to be a part of something you can’t draw a picture of that I can see in advance and use to make my choices.”
- Forgive me if any of this gets too close to what you are feeling about coming changes for FBC. I must admit, it is close to what I feel sometimes as well when God won’t be as specific as I would like.

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- Please, forgive me if I suggest this is more like us needing to have laws by which to live rather than an *attitude* that allows us somehow to live more by grace as we walk around fulfilling the specifics.
- Please watch what I mean as I read the Holy Ground of Philippians 2:1-11 and then suggest that somehow God expects pirates like you and me and all those other guys in FBC who are even more pirate-like than us—how in the world he expects us to be a good church unified on his mission in the liminal, changing days we face together (I Hope) ahead. **READ Philippians 2:1-2**
- As you have probably heard, these verses are asking questions rhetorically. Paul knows the Philippians have indeed experienced all these things together unity with Christ, comfort from Christ's love, fellowship or sharing through the Holy Spirit, and then tenderness and compassion (likely for each other in the midst of this sharing and unity).
- Since you Philippians know all this about God's mission together is real from experience, then make my joy as full as it could ever be. How? By being like-minded. That doesn't mean to think exactly the same thoughts about everything all the time. It means thinking in the same direction about who God is, who you are, and what he is up to with you.
- How? By having a consistent love for one another and for Paul. They loved this man who loved the opportunity even to die for the Gospel mission. What Paul was saying to them now might make him harder to love and might make it more difficult to love each other as well.
- How? By being united in the spirit of what you are up to on the mission even if sometimes you can't agree on the details of how to carry it out. This is one of those times that the word translated spirit may mean human spirit with a small "s." But even so, the Philippians'

human spirits—small “s”—are empowered and linked to God’s Holy Spirit with a big “S.”

- How? By having a united “purpose”—a goal—a common target that you are all shooting at. This may be specific at times but I suspect most often it could have been as general as, “Our goal is to be a church existing for God’s redemptive mission not our own comfort or tradition.
- What do people sometimes say? “***The devil is in the details.***” It is no problem saying we are like-minded, we love one another, we are united in spirit and in purpose—no problem at all until the first time we disagree on some choice—some detail—that will impact us all.
- “*Well, Raleigh, just tell us what those details might be and we can then decide if we are like-minded, and we want to have the same spirit and purpose and if we still love one another the same way.*”
- Ah, herein lies the rub! Paul calls for this based in faith because of what the Philippians have already experienced together in Christ, not based on a detailed description of what is to come. They are not given this **codification**—a list of details—specific details that cover all the important situations that might arise—you know as law codes attempt to do but ultimately always fail in doing.
- They are asked to trust God as they love one another on his mission together in the future. To live it by God’s grace, as you will, rather than by the specifics of a known, detailed code.
- BUT again, HOW will they do this How then shall we live? How will we walk around in real life in this tomorrow when we need to make choices and we don’t all agree on all the details? **WWJD????** (What would Jesus do?) **No WWJBL?** (What would Jesus be like?) What ATTITUDE would he have that we too can have—even the *rabble* of pirates that we are?

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- I haven’t said it yet but most of you already know and have thus anticipated what that **attitude** of Jesus will be when revealed in the text.
- If there were no problems with the connotations our English word that is eventually translated for Jesus’ *attitude*, I could give that to you in just that one word. However, we might read some things into this *attitude* of Jesus from our word that weren’t part of **his attitude**.
- So, please look at verses 3 and 4 to begin to see the *attitude* of the incarnate Son of God in time and space, just as we now are, on God’s mission in this world, just as we also are today.
- **READ Philippians 2:3-4**
- Jesus’ *attitude* for life on the mission was such that he made no “missional choices” out of “*selfish ambition*.” Jesus did not do anything in life that was motivated to achieve something for self-promoting reasons. He did nothing to get ahead of others in personal significance. Sounds odd already when we know we are talking about the very Son of God.
- How much of what folks long to do in our time, even in connection with a church, is motivated by the desire to gain personal significance? How many people “*go into ministry*” as a “profession” because they think it will provide a meaningful significance doing something spiritual? How could that be wrong? Well, I can tell you it isn’t like Jesus if we do any of it with the ambition of gaining personal significance.
- “*Vain conceit*” is clearer to me. Jesus did not make choices for the mission based on empty pride. He did not do things just to show off how special he was—how much better he was than others around him were. Which again seems odd because he was “special.”

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- Both of these qualities Jesus did NOT live out are qualified in negative ways—**selfish** ambition and **vain or empty** conceit.
- Both of these happen in our experience when we are trying to prove something about our own value—our own significance in ways that really don’t prove or increase our value. Both of these are about humans making a name for themselves instead of for God.
- The mission of the church—Jesus’ ongoing mission--was not and is not a means of gaining personal value. Instead, that mission is about reveling in and making obvious the value God has placed on humans already as Creator in the imago dei—and His purpose for our lives.
- Jesus was not at all confused about this and felt no lack of personal value based on human evaluation. He knew who he was and why he was doing what he was doing so he could do it for God rather than selfish or vain reasons. This is a tough one in the churches many of us know today!
- The contrast gives us the word for the *attitude* of Jesus. He, of all human beings who ever have lived that could have been otherwise, he was **humble!**
- That has sometimes become a word describing “weakness” in our English-speaking context today. Super-star entertainers, athletes, internet influencers, politicians and others live as if having humility is being weak. It is not weakness, according to God, Paul’s letter and Jesus’ attitude! Humility must, in fact, be one of the strongest forces for righteousness a human can possess.
- By humility here, Paul means that Jesus considered others “better” than himself. That could be misleading if “better” is on the scale of our human culture. Considering others better meant that Jesus considered their true, good needs, according to God, were more important than his own were.

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- The interest of the other was as important to consider in his choices and actions as any self-interest he felt.
- Humility for Jesus was putting the true “good” of others first in accomplishing the plan of God for redemption.
- Paul describes how that worked out in choices made in time and space—the same time and space in which we live. Look at those holy-ground, familiar and wonderful verses from 5-11.
- **READ Philippians 2:5-11**
- Jesus’ *attitude* of humility meant he put the true good of others first on the mission. In fact that was, in many ways the meaning of the incarnation of the Son of God. It certainly becomes the example of WWJBL? (What Would Jesus Be Like?) for us to keep as our *attitude* as we are on that continuing redemptive mission together.
- Christ Jesus had and has the very “nature” of God. He “corresponds from inside out to God.” What is true of God is true of Christ Jesus because he is God.
- This means Christ Jesus deserved to be recognized, treated and worshipped as very God when he walked this earth.
- But his attitude of humility meant he did not demand what he deserved—he didn’t hang onto it because somehow the accolades made him valuable—made him God.
- He did what in time and space is the opposite. He emptied himself of all that rightful recognition and worship as God and became a servant from the inside out in time and space.
- The Creator took on all that it originally meant to be a created human for God’s purposes.
- In his attitude of humility, for the sake of the mission of redemption, Christ Jesus did not live as a human who demanded or deserved

even human accolades. He chose to live as a lowly human—by human standards—a servant.

- In his attitude of humility as a lowly servant, he didn’t choose to escape the rough and sacrificial parts of being human. No, he chose to die and even to die a lowly death.
- All of this sacrifice—undeserved sacrifice—Christ Jesus chose for the sake of God’s glory through God’s mission of redemption.
- We need not worry that this sacrifice will go unnoticed or even unrewarded. No, its demonstration of the attitude of humility is so powerful, it proves he actually deserves to be named by all as LORD of all Creation.
- Christ Jesus loses nothing of who he is—nothing of his real value by having an attitude of humility and that attitude leading to sacrifice for others on the redemptive mission of God.
- Oh, that Christians today would listen to Paul say: **“Your attitude should be the same of that as Christ Jesus...”** Oh, that we of FBC would listen and have this attitude of true humility as together we face ambiguity and need discernment that maintains true unity in truth and love in the days ahead.
- If you and I have this attitude of Jesus, humility that puts the true need of others sacrificially before our own needs, we will be united in spirit and purpose for God’s glory for the mission of FBC ahead. If we act toward one another out of vain conceit or selfish ambition—watch out! Scarcity from change and sacrifice can get ugly, even in a church without humility.
- A few years into my time, here in FBC, I discovered that some FBC folks thought being a “Free Grace” church meant there was freedom to say and do whatever an individual wanted to say and do. It meant sin didn’t matter—in fact, no one could tell anyone else even that

something was sin. Free Grace meant we were each free to live however we wanted to live.

- That is not what a Free Grace is about nor what makes a church a Free Grace church. Free Grace is not about a freedom to sin but it is about a “mindset.” That mindset is the belief that the Bible teaches we relate to God on the basis of trusting Him for his freely given grace from the beginning—the day we trust Jesus and are born again—until the end—the day we stand face-to-face before the Lord.
- We do not relate to God on the basis of performing a well-defined list of specific rules to which we must measure up.
- Free Grace living comes from a mindset of truth not from knowing in advance how to get everything right. We might even say that free-grace living and free-grace church is an **attitude** because a mindset determines our *attitude*.
- Earlier, I *juxtaposed* (There! I got to say it once more) the glorious holy ground of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ with the bawdy, idea of pirates and we reminded ourselves we have sometimes joked about being “the pirate church.”
- Are we the “pirate church” because we wear tattered, dirty clothes, steal treasure and speak funny? No. We are the pirate church because pirates live by ATTITUDE—by MIND-set—not by keeping lists of codified laws. Captain Jack Sparrow explained that that the pirates’ code is not really a set of exacting rules to be lived, “*but more like guidelines.*” In other words, being a pirate church is more about *attitude* than it is about knowing everything and getting it right.
- That is why, when it comes to being on God’s mission together, we have self-identified as a sort-of “pirate church”—more about an

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attitude than about writing down all the rules and getting them right.

- As we move on to the next phase of our mission together, this quality of FBC will be more important than ever.
- If we live by an attitude, even when we don’t have all the details and aren’t sure of all the rights and wrongs in decisions—if we live by an attitude and that attitude is the same as Jesus’ was—humility as he modeled it—If we live in an attitude of humility toward one another and the world God loves—we will not just survive to open some church doors on Sunday, we will thrive to advance the redemptive mission of God in ways we cannot yet even imagine—let alone describe in detail.
- I believe this in my bones. I believe we have a choice. I’m still not sure what we will choose together.
- May this **attitude** be **in all of us** the same **humble** attitude of Christ Jesus the, Lord of the universe, and meant to be the true head—the true brains and boss--of Fellowship Bible Church.