

## 14. The Book of Philippians 2:12-18

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### *Joy in Service-Part 2*

a message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier  
(9-3-23)

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Find this weeks' sermon audio and video message [HERE](#).

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We have begun a study in Paul's letter to the Philippians—looking at its theme of 'joy' topically.

So far, we've looked at:

- I. Joy in Fellowship—1:3-6
- II. Joy in Proclaiming the Gospel—1:12-18
- III. Joy of Faith—1:25
- IV. Joy in Unity—1:27-2:2
- V. Joy in Service—2:12-18

#### **Philippians 2:12–18 (NKJV)**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. <sup>14</sup> Do all things without complaining and disputing, <sup>15</sup> that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, <sup>16</sup> holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. <sup>17</sup> Yes, and if I am being poured out *as a drink offering* on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. <sup>18</sup> For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

Last time we looked at:

#### **A. The actions of a servant—John 13:12-17**

This morning I'd like to look at another aspect of being a servant—possibly the greatest teaching on the subject of servanthood in the Bible—let's call it the "*principle of servanthood*."

#### **B. The principle of servanthood—Matthew 20:20-28**

#### **Matthew 20:20-21 (NKJV)**

<sup>20</sup> Then the mother of Zebedee's sons [James and John] came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. <sup>21</sup> And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom."

The concern of Jewish mothers for their sons is legendary—however Mark’s gospel implies that James and John asked their mother to go to Jesus for them with this request.

Now we can’t be too hard on James and John—wanting greatness in this life for ourselves is just part of who we are as fallen human beings—it’s rooted in our *pride*.

It’s pride that wants to be great in the sense of *honor, prestige, and power* over others.

That is why politics attracts so many people who really aren’t looking to serve others (‘civil servant’ is a misnomer)— instead they are looking to be served and to use their power to enrich themselves and lord it over others.

Now very often the way people obtain greatness in this world is through special favors based on family relationships—having family in business or in a place of power where they can give them positions of influence and prestige.

This is exactly what Salomé tried to do with Jesus—she tried to get Him to grant her request based on *nepotism*. You see Salome was the sister of Mary who was the mother of Jesus—which meant that Jesus was her nephew and James and John were His first cousins.

So, Salome was first of all relying on her relationship with Jesus as His aunt to afford her preferential treatment (in Jewish culture family was very important and nepotism was considered the perk of being family and normal).

So, first of all she relies on her family relationship with Jesus to undergird her request—but then to stack the deck further in her favor she employs a nakedly transparent attempt at flattery. She tries to butter Jesus up by kneeling down before Him.

The Greek word is *proskuneo* which is the same word translated worship in many other places in the N.T.

In other words, she worshipped Jesus in order to get something from Him—a tactic that many use to try and get things from God. To say this request was bold would be an understatement—because sitting at the right and left hands of a king were the highest positions of honor in his kingdom.

Now knowing that this request originated with James and John—Jesus turns to them and says:

**Matthew 20:22 (NKJV)**

<sup>22</sup> ...**"You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able."**

The ‘**cup**’ that Jesus mentions here was the cup of *suffering and death*—the very thing He had just finished talking about in verse 18-19 with regard to Himself. This was confirmed in the Garden of Gethsemane the morning of His crucifixion—

**Matthew 26:39 (NKJV)**

<sup>39</sup> He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*."

This **cup** is talked about in other places in Scripture as the “*cup of God’s indignation and wrath*” (Revelation 14:10)—which was poured out full strength on Jesus when He hung on the cross and paid for our sins by dying in our place.

**Baptism** is a word that means to be *immersed* in something—here it’s a reference to His being immersed in His mission to die for the sins of humanity—which is how He used it in Luke 12:50:

**Luke 12:50 (NKJV)**

<sup>50</sup> But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!

So, Jesus is essentially saying to James and John that greatness and glory in the coming earthly Kingdom (Millennial Kingdom) can’t be granted as a favor to friends and family—it is earned by being a suffering servant for the cause of Christ.

**Matthew 20:22 (NKJV)**

<sup>22</sup>[Jesus said] ...Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "**We are able.**"

I’m sure at that moment James and John had no idea what they were saying—but they would go on to find out that following Jesus didn’t lead to a crown, at least not *initially*—but to a cross presently. I think that too many people start to follow Jesus too quickly without first counting the cost—even as Jesus admonished potential disciples:

**Matthew 16:24–26 (NKJV)**

<sup>24</sup> ...“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

But listen, suffering and persecution for Jesus’ sake has a way of weeding out the phonies—as Jesus taught in the Parable of Sower where some of the seed fell on ‘*shallow soil*’:

**Matthew 13:3–6 (NLT)**

<sup>3</sup> He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: “Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. <sup>4</sup> As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. <sup>5</sup> Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots, they died.

**Matthew 13:18–21 (NLT)**

<sup>18</sup> “Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: <sup>19</sup> The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don’t understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. <sup>20</sup> The seed on the rocky [shallow] soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. <sup>21</sup> But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word.

Enduring suffering and persecution for Jesus’ sake not only proves someone is a genuine believer—but it also acquires rewards and honor for them in heaven—

**Matthew 5:11-12 (NKJV)**

<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

**Matthew 20:22-23 (NKJV)**

<sup>22</sup> But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." <sup>23</sup> **So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.*"**

Jesus assured them that they would indeed drink of His cup of suffering—James became the first martyr of the Church Age (Acts 12:2); and John was persecuted and exiled to the Isle of Patmos for a time (Rev. 1:19).

**Matthew 20:24 (NKJV)**

<sup>24</sup> **And when the ten heard *it*, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.**

Look, don't think the other disciples were displeased because they were repulsed by the carnality and pride of James and John in seeking greatness for themselves—the other disciples were just as guilty of this and had demonstrated the same selfish ambition themselves numerous times during Jesus' earthly ministry—I'll give you one example:

**Mark 9:33-34 (NKJV)**

<sup>33</sup> Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" <sup>34</sup> But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who *would be the greatest*.

Now, all of that was the background or context—verses 25-28 become the actual *principle* of servanthood:

**Matthew 20:25-26 (NKJV)**

<sup>25</sup> **But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.**

In other words, the 'Gentiles' (unbelievers) measure greatness in terms of how many people they are in authority *over*—but greatness in the eyes of God is measured by how many people you put yourself *under* to serve.

**Matthew 20:27 (NKJV)**

<sup>27</sup> **And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave--**

'**First**' is a Greek word that, in this context means—first in the sense of *honor and importance*.

So, in the eyes of the world the higher up you climb in business or in politics and the more people you have authority over—the greater you are.

However, Jesus is saying that just the opposite is true from how God views greatness.

Again, in God's eyes the more people you place yourself *under* to serve (as a slave—someone who has no rights)—the greater you will be in the Kingdom someday.

In fact, Kingdom thinking and living are so contrary from the world's way of looking at things—that when Jesus taught on the subject His teaching seemed *paradoxical* and even crazy to the unsaved mind.

He said things like:

- *“He who finds his life will lose it but he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”*
- *“The first will be last and the last will be first.”*
- *“When it comes to the Kingdom—if you want to be somebody you have to be nobody.”*
- *“The more you give away the richer you’ll become.”* (Luke 6:38)
- *“If you humble yourself, you’ll be exalted but if you exalt yourself you’ll be humbled”—or in other words—  
“The way down is the way up and the way up is the way down.”*

The problem today is that many pastors and evangelists have tried to make Christianity appealing to the unsaved mind—in an attempt to reach them with the gospel.

**Galatians 1:9–10 (NKJV)**

<sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. <sup>10</sup> For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

The true gospel of Jesus Christ is not the *broadway* of tolerance and inclusion (which leads to hell)—it’s the *narrow way* of persecution and rejection (which leads to heaven)

In other words, it’s the way of the cross—the way of Christ! (John 14:6)

Jesus continues to teach His disciples the principle of servanthood—

**Matthew 20:28 (NKJV)**

<sup>28</sup> **just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**"

The Greek word for **ransom** was used for the price paid to free a slave.

This Greek word only appears twice in the New Testament—here in Matthew 20:28 and in the parallel passage in Mark 10:45. In both passages it refers to Jesus giving Himself as the price (the ransom) to redeem us from the slavery of sin and death.

The word is followed by the preposition **“for”** (the Greek is—‘anti’) which means *‘instead of’* or *‘in the place of’*. In other words, it speaks of a substitute—someone who dies *instead of* or *in the place of* another.

Only Jesus could have died in our place—

**Isaiah 53:4–6 (NLT)**

<sup>4</sup> Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down...<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. <sup>6</sup> All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.

**Matthew 20:27-28 (NKJV)**

**<sup>27</sup> And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave-- <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."**

There are those in society who work in what's called the 'service industry' (waiters, cooks, busboys, bellhops, maids, caregivers etc.)

These are people who are *paid* servants—they don't serve in these jobs for the pure joy of serving others—they expect to be paid for their services (there's nothing wrong with that, these are hard-working people).

But Christians are those who serve purely for the joy of helping others.

Christian service by its very definition is *sacrificial*—the giving of yourself to others, putting them first and yourself last is at the heart of what it means to be a servant.

Remember what Jesus said, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

One thing about Christian service—there is joy in serving others and doing it as if we're doing it for Jesus (*"Whatever you do for the least of these, My brethren, you do for Me."*).

But the ultimate joy (and rewards) will be when we stand before Him one day and lay those acts of service at His feet (acts of worship) and hear Him say—*"Well done good and faithful servant..."*

In other words, our greatest joy and glory for our service is not now—it is deferred to the future!

One author said—

*"To serve Christ, one must follow Him. He would have His servants obey His teachings and resemble Him morally. They must apply the example of His death to themselves. All servants are promised the constant presence and protection of their Master, and this applies not only to the present life but to eternity as well. Service now will receive God's approval in a coming day. Whatever one suffers of shame or reproach here will be small indeed compared to the glory of being publicly commended by God the Father in heaven!"*

Again, let the words of Jesus on the topic of servanthood sink deep into your mind and heart—

**"I have not come to be served but to serve and to give My life a ransom for others."**

Somehow our modern American Christianity has moved from being Christ-centered and others-centered to being self-centered.

Maybe that's the big reason why so many Christians seem empty and unhappy inside—they're trying to find happiness in all the things the world has to offer.

Only Jesus can fill up an empty heart and make a person truly *happy*—but only then as a 'by-product' (a 'fruit') of having a relationship with Him.

So once more—Jesus is teaching us that the secret to living a happy and fulfilled life is becoming a servant to others.

Next week we'll continue in the **"Joy of Servanthood."**

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If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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