

Good morning! I'll echo Pastor Kuerth's welcome to all of you this morning, and also give a warm welcome to everyone who is watching via the livestream this morning—we're glad you can join us. Let's begin with prayer. "May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts always be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, our Rock and our Redeemer." Amen.

It's something that happens on a somewhat regular basis. And whenever it happens I become very sad, disappointed, and my heart sinks. I'm talking about that moment I open the freezer door, grab out the birthday cake flavored ice cream, take the lid off, and find that the container is almost totally...empty. When the ice cream is empty—I get sad. That's just how life is.

But on a serious note—generally when something is empty—that's not a good thing! Empty gas tank—not good. Empty bank account—not good. The phrase "glass half empty"—it's not a positive and uplifting phrase. You can have an empty cupboard, refrigerator, an empty house, garage, closet, an empty feeling in the fit of your stomach, an empty heart...none of those things are generally seen as good things!

And yet—you'll see on page 5 that the theme of this sermon is "Embrace Emptiness." Embrace—you only embrace something or someone you love. You give a handshake to a stranger or an acquaintance, and you might give a half-hearted one-handed hug to a distant relative or just because you feel you have to, but to embrace somebody—it's a big bear hug that tells someone you really care about them. And so you might say, "Nathan, why do you want me to love emptiness, to treat it like it's a great friend I love hanging out with?" We'll find the answer to that question—why should I embrace Emptiness? ...as we look at God's Words found in Philippians chapter 2. We'll read them throughout the course of the sermon.

In the beginning of Paul's letter, he had praised the Philippians up and down. He said, "I thank God every time I think of you. I pray joyfully because you are my partners in the gospel—you are my brothers and sisters as Christians." Paul praised them through and through, but in the first part of our lesson, he asked them to do one more thing, and he prefaced his request with verse 1. **"Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,**

Paul wasn't simply asking them if being a Christian had encouraged and comforted them. The words he used when he wrote shows us that he was reminding them that they did in fact have all these things—they *did* have **encouragement, comfort, common sharing, tenderness, and compassion**. And since they had those things, Paul asked them ² **then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind**. Paul said the same thing 3 times in a row: Be unified. Act like you all share one mind—one goal.

And Paul continued in verses 3 and 4: ³ **Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,** ⁴ **not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others**. What's a very easy way to cause a group of people to be *not* unified. Just have everyone in the group be selfish and think first of themselves. In these two verses Paul really hit the nail on the head as he defined what humility actually is. On page 2 of your worship folder you might've seen humility defined, "Humility isn't thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves less." That is, being humble doesn't mean saying, "I am a terrible person. I have no gifts. I am not worth anything to anyone. I am not confident in myself at all." True humility has more to do with our relationships with other people—are you going to think about the needs of others first or your own needs? Are you going to try to make yourself look good or try to make others look good? That's humility—thinking about ourselves less often.

What were the Philippians thinking when they heard these words? Most likely there were some sideways glances as they thought, "Is selfishness and conceit a problem *with us*? Am *I* being selfish in *my* thinking? Am *I* simply thinking about how to make myself look good to other people? If Paul asked them to be humble and try to help other people before helping themselves, then to some extent that must've *not* been happening.

My brothers and sisters—what about us? What do you think when you hear Paul encourage that group of Christians to act in humility? I'm thinking, "This is tough to admit, but I know I have not been humble all the time. I *have* acted for myself instead of others." We do act in ways that show we care about ourselves more than others, because every person's heart is naturally turned inward. Sometimes this shows itself by blatant selfish actions, but I think the deeper problem is when our selfishness is not so obvious. When we act like we're serving others, but we are really serving ourselves. What does that mean? It means that outwardly we are being the most wonderful person in the world—listening patiently as someone tells us about the family issues they saying, I'll keep you in my prayers—but inwardly thinking, "I look really good right now, and people are going to say I am a very caring person." It means coming early to set up for church or Bible Quest or the Victory Café and thinking in your mind "People are going to think very highly of me—I am just so good at serving!"

And my friends, when we act that way, not only do we hurt others by not serving them as best we could because we're more focused on our own glory, but when we focus inward and try to bring glory to ourselves, we actually also hurt ourselves. Because the fact

is—we can never get enough attention for ourselves; we will never be satisfied with the way people view us; we will always strive after more personal glory. We have to keep on getting people to think we're great! That puts an incredible amount of pressure on me! Because there will always be doubts—I'll never quite know for sure how people are thinking about me—and so I'll always feel the need to try to impress them with more acts of service...but my real goal is to serve myself and make myself look good. The word that is translated vain conceit literally means "empty glory." Which is exactly what conceit is—you think you are great, you try to glorify yourself. And on top of the pressure of having to manipulate other people into thinking about me a certain way, I will always know in my heart of hearts that my motive is false and that I am sinning. No, friends, **selfish ambition** and **vain conceit** is never good—neither for other people nor for ourselves.

Thankfully Paul didn't stop there in his letter—when the Philippians were casting sideways glances, thinking of the ways they had not done what Paul was asking, Paul didn't leave them hanging. He answers their pangs of guilt and he answers ours as well. He gives us the cure to our sin-sick heart: Let's read verses 5-11. ⁵ **In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:** ⁶ **Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;** ⁷ **rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.** ⁸ **And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!** ⁹ **Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,** ¹⁰ **that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,** ¹¹ **and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

One of the most beautiful sections in all of Scripture. 100 sermons could be written on these verses—but we're not here to talk about all those subjects this morning. We're here to talk about one thing in particular: Christ's humility. Look at the beginning of verse 7—Christ **made himself nothing**. That verb, it literally means, "Christ emptied himself." Ahh—lightbulbs go on. Here is the emptiness that is so worth embracing—Christ's emptiness.

Christ emptied himself for us. The God of the universe became a human. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords became a baby in a stable. The owner of everything in the world had no place to lay his head. The One who has the authority to place the constellations in the sky became a servant—a slave. The immortal God who has existed since eternity—he became mortal. He died. And on top of that, he died in the most humiliating way possible. *Even* to death on a cross. Jesus emptied himself in all those ways—for you. In all those things that I just listed—he did them because he was thinking about your needs before his needs. Christ didn't need to hold on to the fact that he was truly God. He wasn't driven by the fact that people recognized he was great. He was willing to put his Godly power away for a time, because that's what he needed to do to save you and me.

I don't think we fully realize just how astonishing it is that Christ emptied himself for us—because there is no situation on earth to which we can compare it—no earthly humility can compare to Christ's. Imagine if Bill Gates went on a coffee run for the new interns every single day for 3 months. That doesn't compare to Christ's service. Imagine if President Obama came to a 5 yr-old girl from VOTL and said, "I want to go back to Kindergarten, and I want you to live in the White House." Unbelievable, but nowhere near what Christ did. Even the very real example of a soldier jumping on a grenade to save his fellow soldiers. An extremely humble act of love—but even that doesn't compare to Christ emptying himself. God died on the cross simply out of love for us.

All the ways Christ emptied himself—they do two things for us. They **comfort** us and **encourage** us (please put verse 1 on the screen with those two words bolded).

First—we receive comfort because Jesus emptied himself to erase all the times we don't empty ourselves in humility. The guilt we feel when we know we've put ourselves before others, when we've been selfish—that guilt has vanished. It doesn't exist anymore. You don't have to look around and wonder if anybody noticed your sin or if God is mad at you because you're not perfect. Christ emptied all your sin and guilt out of your record and replaced it with his perfection.

And second—encouragement. The fact that Christ emptied himself out of love for us encourages us to empty ourselves for others, recognizing that their needs, interests, and desires are more important than ours. And we do this to give thanks and glory to God. And when our goal in life is to put others before ourselves and serve them, to empty ourselves for the sake of others, not so we look good, but so *God* looks good, the pressure is all gone. We don't have to worry about making God look good. We don't have to prove over and over again that God is good, because God is good without any of our actions.

So...do you understand what it means to embrace emptiness and why we should indeed embrace it? First of all, we embrace the fact that Christ emptied himself for us when he gave up his heavenly glory for a time, came to earth, and allowed himself to be killed in the most humiliating way possible—by crucifixion. All this he did for us, that we would be his own and be united with him forever in heaven. Secondly, we embrace emptying ourselves for others because it is what God asks us to do out of love and thanks to him. And when we truly live to serve God and others—all the pressure of having to perform and make ourselves look good is gone. We know we don't have to make God look good—he already is, and we know that we already look good because Christ emptied himself for us. May God give us all the strength to empty ourselves for him and for everyone else in our lives. Amen.