

Victory of the Lamb
Pastor Ben Sadler
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Theme: Joy of unity
Text: Philippians 2:1-11

2 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, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 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.

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. (Philippians 2:1-11)**

Crises usually brings people together. I remember speaking with a distant relative who fought in WWII, and he said that during the war, the whole country was unified against the Nazis. I felt the same way after 9-11. We had been attacked by the Taliban. And we were unified around that common enemy.

This pandemic has been different. It has completely divided our country. Some people believe that this is hoax and the enemy is the medical professional and the politicians. Some people see this as incredibly serious and believe the enemy are the businesses and individuals who are fighting to reopen. We are divided and are at war with one another. Then, with the murder of George Floyd and others, again, we were divided and fighting each other. Some people believe that the police are at fault and black lives matter. Some look at the rioting and all the police who have been harmed and say, "blue lives matter." We are divided as a nation. We are fighting each other.

But the Bible is very clear, **¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:10-12)**

Paul says that our fight is not against each other, not against flesh and blood. It is against the devil. The devil is at work. And I'm sure of it because the devil divides. On the third page of the Bible, the devil led

Adam and Eve to be divided from God as they tried to set themselves up as a god. Then, their guilt and shame led them to be divided and isolated from each other.

The devil wants to get humans separated from God and separate from each other. He wants to divide us so much that life becomes a living hell. You see, hell is a place of complete and eternal isolation, which brings despair and hopelessness. And that's what the devil wants to do. He wants to turn your life into a living hell.

If the devil divides, what does God want to do. God wants to unite. He united Adam and Eve in marriage and gave them the gift of sex to be united at the deepest level. When Adam and Eve sinned he went to find them. And then on the last page of the Bible, we see that God wants to unite heaven and earth again, as heaven comes down and God dwells with his people again. And that unity brings joy and peace. The devil wants to turn your life into a living hell through division. God wants you to experience heaven on earth through unity.

So here is the question I want to answer today: **How can we begin to experience the joy of unity?** In other words, how can we experience a slice of heaven on earth?

To answer that question, we are going to continue to study the book of Philippians. We are continuing our sermon series called **Finding Joy**, which is a study through the book of Philippians. Paul is writing this letter from prison to his church in Philippi. The letter is basically a "thank you" letter for their partnership in the gospel because when the Philippians heard that Paul was in prison, they sent a gift with Epaphroditus to take care of Paul's needs.

So, this church in Philippi is a good church. But he is still concerned about division. He knows that they live in a divided culture. They were divided on race and class, and Paul is concerned that those societal divisions are going to divide the church.

Victory is a good church, but we live in a divided and individualistic society. And I'm concerned that those divisions are affecting us in the church. We are not any better than the people out there. So we need to work towards unification.

Before Paul leads us to be unified with each other, he wants us to experience and even more important relationship:

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, then ... (Philippians 2:1-2)

Paul wants to remind the Philippians that they have been united with Jesus. Jesus stepped into this world that was separated from God to bring us back together. In fact, Jesus got this reputation that he was the kind of person who "welcomed sinners and ate with them." For example, one day he was traveling to Galilee and the Bible said that he "had to go through Samaria." He didn't have to, but he wanted to be meet with a sinful woman at the well and invite her back into union with God. Another time he found a wicked tax collector named Zacchaeus. He said, "I want to come to your house today." Then Paul himself, the author of this letter. When Paul was separated from God and breathing out murderous threats against Christians Jesus met with him and invited him back into a relationship with God.

The reason Jesus could welcome sinners and eat with them is because of his work on the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, he paid for all our sin. He broke down the barrier that separated us and divided us from God.

Now Jesus invites us to be united with God. He does that through baptism. The Bible says that we have buried with Christ in our baptism so that when we came out of the water, we can live a new life with Jesus. When we open up our Bibles, any part of the Bible, we are meeting with Jesus. He is talking with us. And when we receive the Lord's Supper we are eating with Jesus as we receive his body and blood in remembrance of what he did on the cross.

Paul says that we *share in the Spirit*. He is reminding us that the Holy Spirit actually dwells within us. That's how unified we are with God. He makes his residence with in us.

So here is what Paul wants you to know:

1. We are one with God through faith in Jesus.

Paul says that our unity with Jesus and the Holy Spirit gives us feelings of encouragement, comfort and love, tenderness, and compassion. In other words, unity with God brings us joy.

It reminds me of how I felt in 5th grade. I was starting a new school and I felt like an outsider. But then I was invited to a party. And not just any party. This party had both boys and girls and dancing. The joy of being invited and the anticipation was almost better than the party itself.

God has invited you to be one with him through Jesus Christ, and that fills us with joy. It is a slice of heaven on earth. The devil divides but God has united us with him in Jesus Christ.

Because we have unity with God, Paul says that that leads us to take a next step. We are united with Christ so then he says,... **then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. (Philippians 2:2)**

Paul says that because we have been unified with God, now be unified with one another. The devil divides and God wants us to bring us together. Paul says that because are united with Christ, we are supposed to be united with one another.

2. Be united to one another.

Look at how he describes this unity. He says, be like-minded, which means think about the same things. Have the same love. Love the same thing. Be one in spirit. Be passionate about the same thing. Have one mind. Which means have the same purpose.

So what are we supposed to think about, love, be passionate about, and find purpose in? Jesus, his kingdom and his story and his love. Let's all think more and more about Jesus. At the front of our thoughts, let's not just think about the pandemic or politics or all our division. Let's think about Jesus, his kingdom and his love, that will bring us together. Let's love Jesus and his kingdom and his love for people. Let's not just love ourselves and our own pleasures. Let's love Jesus. That will bring us together. Let's be passionate about Jesus and his kingdom. Let's not just be passionate about our own opinions and ideas. Let's be passionate about Jesus. That will bring us together. Let's have one purpose to further Jesus' kingdom and spread his love. That's what will bring us together.

Paul says that if we take that step to be unified, then his joy will be complete. Why would unity bring Paul complete joy? Well, when we are together, it is harder for the devil to divide us. There seems to be a few divisions on the church at Philippi. There was a division between two women, Euodia and Syntyche. I've seen that happen in congregations. A few people get divided around their own opinions and preferences. That's dangerous because the devil divides.

I believe the devil is especially at work with new Christians. They might come into the church for the first time and not know anyone. The devil will keep them divided. I know a woman who started coming to church. And she said, "You know before I came to church, I never had plans on Sundays. Now that I'm going to church everyone wants to come and visit on Sundays." Thankfully, she had made real connections with other people in the church. She was not alone, she stayed strong.

And that's what brought Paul joy and that's what brings me joy. When the church is unified around Jesus and passionate about Jesus, when people are building real relationships with one another, I'm filled with joy because God is at work uniting people. And they will be stronger to stand up against the devil.

So how do we actually get this kind of unity? Paul begins by telling us what we shouldn't do:

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (Philippians 2:3)

If we are going to be unified, then we can't be living for our own selfish ambition. Because if we live for ourselves we won't have time to walk with anyone else. I think about the story of Michael Jordan. More people are rediscovering Michael Jordan because of the documentary "The Last Dance". I'm one of the few people who didn't see the documentary yet.

There used to be an ad campaign, "I want to be like Mike." Michael Jordan is the greatest basketball player to ever live. But I don't want to be like him. He is one of the loneliest men on the planet. He lived for one reason, his own selfish ambition. He lived to dominate his opponents. And we got to see the true character of Michael Jordan when he gave his speech at the Hall of Fame. It was the worst speech in history. He said that he felt sorry for his kids because they would never live up to his legacy. He ridiculed his head coach for being too stupid to see his talent. He threw his coaches and teammates under the bus for getting in his way. He lived for his vain conceit, literally empty glory.

If we want to be on a team and united with the family of believers, we need to put away our pursuit of personal glory. We need to put away our selfish ambition. You can't be united to another human being if you are living for yourself.

So if we don't want to "be like Mike" who do we want to imitate? Paul says, **⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: (Philippians 2:5)**

Paul goes on to quote an early Christian hymn:

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—
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Jesus is God and so when he came into the world, he could have been anybody. He could have been a great athlete like Michael Jordan. Or a great ruler and conqueror like Julius Caesar or Alexander the Great. But instead, he chose to take the form of a servant. As a servant he made the ultimate sacrifice by giving up his life.

So if we are going to be united, we must:

3. Be like Jesus.

If we are going to be united as a church, that means we can't come into this church asking, "What's in it for me? How can Victory serve me? How can this church meet my needs?" It means we say, "How can I help? How can I serve? What sacrifices can I make to unify this congregation?"

To be united we need to make some sacrifices. That means we might need to sacrifice time or energy, so that we can pour into others. We might need to make sacrifices to join a small group or mentoring group or a serving group so that we can be united together. I've seen this happening, but when we keep doing to more and more our joy will be complete.

What if we all did this? What if we all made sacrifices so that we could be united as a congregation? What would happen to us as a congregation? Paul tells us: **Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. (Philippians 2:15-16)** If we, who are united with Christ, make sacrifices to be united with one another, we will shine like stars. This world is becoming a dark place of division. Through the pandemic and all the unrest we have become our own worst enemies. But we have one enemy, the devil. And he wants to divide us all. But if the church would unite, we would shine like stars. We would show our neighborhood and our community the power and joy of our unity in Christ. We are already united with Christ. Let's be united to one another. Let's have the mind of Christ. Amen.