

ZIONSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

REV. JIM CAPPS- MARCH 17, 2013

“SUFFERING SERVANT- OUR EXAMPLE, PART 2”

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

Have you ever heard the story of William Borden? William Borden graduated from a Chicago high school in 1904. As heir to the Borden Dairy estate, he was already a millionaire. For his high school graduation present, his parents gave him a trip around the world. As the young man traveled through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, he felt a growing burden for the world's hurting people. Finally, Borden wrote home to say, "I'm going to give my life to prepare for the mission field." At the same time he wrote these words in the back of his Bible: "No reserves."

Indeed, Borden held back nothing. During his college years at Yale University, he became a pillar in the Christian community. One entry in his personal journal that defined the source of his spiritual strength simply said: "Say no to self and yes to Jesus every time."

During his first semester at Yale, Borden started a small prayer group that would transform campus life. This little group gave birth to a movement that spread across the campus. By the end of his first year, 150 freshmen were meeting for weekly Bible study and prayer. By the time Bill Borden was a senior, 1,000 of Yale's 1,300 students were meeting in such groups.

Borden also strategized with his fellow Christians to make sure every student on campus hears the gospel, and he was often seen ministering to the downtrodden in the streets of New Haven. But his real passion was missions. Once he narrowed his missionary call to the Kansu people in China, Borden never wavered.

Upon graduation from Yale, Borden wrote two more words in the back of his Bible: "No retreats." In keeping with that commitment, Borden turned down several high-paying job offers, enrolling in seminary instead. After graduating, he immediately went to Egypt to learn Arabic because of his intent to work with

Muslims in China. While in Egypt, he contracted spinal meningitis. Within a month, 25-year-old William Borden was dead.

Prior to his death, Borden had written two more words in his Bible. Underneath the words "No reserves" and "No retreats," he had written: "No regrets."

Today as we continue this series on the Suffering Servant, we are going to look once again at the life of another young man who died in a similar part of the world. This young man gave up much, much more than William Borden. In fact, it was precisely because of this young man who died 19 centuries before, that Borden was willing to put himself in the situation which caused his demise. This young man, Jesus, the Suffering Servant, predicted by Isaiah, could have said with Borden, "No reserves," "No retreats," and "No regrets."

This Jesus set the supreme example of how we are to live our lives. No passage in the Bible does a better job of describing the example He set for us than Philippians 2:5-11, which I would like to read right now. Please follow along as I read.

TO EXPERIENCE UNITY, WE MUST HAVE THE ATTITUDE OF CHRIST JESUS.- VS. 5

It's as if Paul is saying to the Philippians and us today, if the first 4 verses which we talked about last week are to become reality, you must follow the example of Jesus. You need an attitude adjustment or a mind transplant so you think like He thinks and then act like He acts.

Practically speaking Paul is saying:

- If you are going to experience encouragement, comfort from His love, fellowship with the Spirit, and tenderness and compassion- you must have the attitude of Christ.
- If you are going to be like-minded, have the same love, be one in spirit and purpose- you must have the attitude of Christ.
- If you are going to be delivered from selfish ambition, vain conceit and self-interest- you must have the attitude of Christ.

While we don't know all of the problems and struggles of the Philippian Church, we do know that at least 2 women, Euodia and Syntyche were in the midst of

some kind of disagreement. Those kinds of differences, no matter how genuine they might have been, may have caused

My dear friends, so it is with us. Over the past 5 years, ZPC which I once heard described as the “Teflon Church” because it seemed that problems or conflicts couldn’t stick, has gone through 5 years of frustration and disillusionment. Now as we come out the other end of this most troubling tunnel of difficulty, it is crucial that together, we have the attitude or mind of Jesus. As we begin the adventure of going “back to the future,” starting all over again, “Our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”

It’s that attitude of Jesus, made possible by the Holy Spirit filling, guiding and empowering us, that we can have the kind of unity about which Paul speaks in the first 4 verses. That kind of unity comes as we are willing to humble ourselves, as individuals and as a church, more than anything else, desiring to be servants of God to each other and the world around us.

Paul goes into stunning detail as he writes what becomes a hymn for the Early Church. This hymn was like their marching orders as they were bombarded by all kinds of outside forces. These powerful words about Jesus’ willingness to humble Himself as a servant, were like a banner unfurled over their heads in the midst of persecution in which many of them were tortured and died. It was that attitude of Jesus, the Suffering Servant, which became the catalyst for the Body of Christ to grow exponentially. The blood of the martyrs became the seeds of the Church.

With that understanding, let’s look together at Paul’s vivid description of the attitude of Christ.

JESUS’ ATTITUDE WAS A 7-FOLD EMPTYING OF HIMSELF. VS. 6-8

Paul starts with the crucial statement that Jesus in His very nature or essential form was God. This is exactly where John starts in the Prologue to his gospel when he writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” While this might have been offensive to some of the religious leaders and philosophers of Paul’s day, there was no doubt in his mind that Jesus was God.

1. Jesus “did not consider equality with God something to be gasped.” While His “essential form” which could never be altered was God, it was not something He clutched tightly.

In a shallow way, it may be like a person who has a doctorate, but does not choose to be called “Dr. So and So.” It’s not something to be grasped even though once he was awarded it, yet, it was always a part of who he was. While that may be a window for our understanding, it feels unbelievably trite in comparison to what Jesus did.

2. “But made himself nothing” The Greek word for what Jesus did in this second step is *kenosis*. It has the idea of completely “emptying” something or someone. It has the idea of pouring out the contents of a container until there is nothing left. It’s as if Jesus is the container and His “essential form” is not changed. He will always be God. But, willingly empties Himself of the peace, the serenity, the glory, and all the other trappings of being God.

British scholar, William Barclay, calls this the “sacrifice of incarnation.” The incarnation is that stunningly wonderful word which speaks of God coming to our world in human form.

Paul captures the wonder of Jesus’ “emptying” when he writes in Ii Corinthians 8:9, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

Wow! This is unbelievably good news!

3. “Taking the very nature of a servant” The Greek word for “very nature” here is the same one used in verse 6 of Jesus being God, carrying the idea of the “essential form” which cannot be altered. In other words, a part of Jesus’ very DNA, His core identity, was that of a servant. This isn’t just a part he is playing. This is who He is.

The word for servant was also used for a slave whose life belonged to and was lived for and at the disposal of the master or owner. Do you see the

impact of this word? Jesus' very identity was wrapped up in being a servant to God and others.

4. "Being made in human likeness" The key idea here is the act of becoming. It's that supreme stooping or humbling to become one of us. The Creator was willing to become the creature to once and for all demonstrate how much He loves us.
5. "Being found in appearance as a man" Very closely aligned to the last phrase, Jesus came to earth not as an animal or a tree or any other object or being, but as a man. It is interesting that the word for "appearance" is different than the word used for being "the very nature" of God and a servant. It has the idea of a state which isn't permanent. He was 100% real as a man but only for a certain season of time.

As you consider both 4 and 5, maybe you've heard of the father and his little son who were out for a walk. They came upon a very active ant hill which fascinated the little guy. He wanted to know what they were thinking and wished that he could tell them how much he liked them. After some thought, the father said that the only way that could happen was for him to become an ant like them. That's exactly what Jesus did when He was "made in human likeness." He was coming to show how much God loves us.

6. "He humbled Himself and became obedient to death" What a huge step to take in showing us how much He wanted to be in solidarity with us, to know what we feel and experience here in this life.

I have often said that the two greatest fears I have seen displayed in my years as a minister is first, the very real human fear of death. Even as followers of Jesus who believe our eternal destiny is with him in heaven, it is instinctual to want to stay alive and to keep from dying. Dying is an unknown to us.

But perhaps even more difficult is the fear of what we will go through before we die. Will it be a sudden automobile accident or heart attack? Or, will it be a long, drawn out, painful passing.

Jesus, as a human being, like us, faced both of these fears. He now knows, existentially how we feel as we encounter death.

7. "Even death on a cross" Crucifixion on a splinter-laden cross was the most cruel, barbaric form of execution devised by human beings at that moment in time. The agony and indignity was multiplied several fold by the beatings before the actual execution and the processional through the streets when the person to be crucified would carry his own cross. As you can imagine, it would be a deterrent to crime. It was so inhumane, that a Roman citizen could not be crucified.

While few, if any, knew what was really happening, Jesus, the Lamb of God, was being sacrificed for the sins of the world. As prophesied by Isaiah, this was the Suffering Servant's ultimate act of emptying Himself so that all who believe in him might experience the soothing balm of forgiveness, the peace which passes human comprehension and a living hope which no one or nothing can squelch.

While we don't have time to look closely at it this morning, we see how God the Father, felt about what Jesus did in His 7-fold emptying of Himself as a servant.

Read Philippians 2:9-11

To go a step further, Paul goes on to say that if the Philippians have the attitude of Christ, they will be like "shining stars" in a crooked and depraved generation.

Tradition says that Paul was beheaded not too long after he wrote these words. Yet, if we could interview Paul, the great rising star and scholar, before he became a follower of Christ, he would say, "No Reserves," "No Retreats" and "No Regrets."

I have stood there in Philippi where tradition says the Philippians were fed to lions and fought against gladiators. Without doubt, I believe that they would say that as followers of Christ who had the mind of Christ and became servants of God and others- "No Reserves," "No Retreats" and "No Regrets." They would have experienced Philippians 3:10-11.- Read

APPLICATION

Dear friends, as you move into the adventure of going back to the future, with all of my heart, I believe that God is going to use you in ways beyond your dreams. As I have done in the past, I would paraphrase I Corinthians 2:9, which Paul paraphrases from Isaiah 64:4:

“No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no heart has dreamed, what God has prepared for those who love Him.”

The key to that future is that last phrase, “for those who love Him.” How do we really love Him? It’s by, if needs be, having an attitude adjustment so that we have the attitude of Christ. What was the attitude of Christ? He had the attitude of a servant who emptied Himself completely to accomplish God’s purpose for Him. That’s why He could have said, “No Reserves,” “No Retreats” and “No Regrets.”

In the adventure of going back to the future with Vision 2020 being lived out in your midst, the thing which God will use more than anything else is the unity that comes through having an attitude which is the same as Jesus. Having that attitude means being willing to empty or humble yourselves and become servants to your Master and the world around you.

When you have that attitude, your focus will not be in filling the plate and the pew. It won’t be on buildings nor programs or slick slogans. You won’t be concerned about how you compare to Traders Point, College Park, or any other effective church in the area. Your eyes won’t be on the great leader whom God has called to be you next senior pastor nor on the wonderful staff whom God has called to serve alongside of you here at this place in this season. None of these ingredients will be your primary focus.

No, your focus will be singular- How can we be servants who empty ourselves in compassionate service to others? How can we so love and serve people that they want to have a relationship with Jesus, too. In essence, by God’s grace and the work of the Holy Spirit, they are loved and served into the Kingdom of God.

You know that we are not going to reach the watching world, 30% who say that they have no religious affiliation by anything less than having the same attitude as the Suffering Servant. Our mission statement, no matter how good it might be or our worship services no matter how well they are executed or our Missions

emphasis no matter how vast it may become, will not impact the watching world as much as emptying ourselves and becoming servants.

Are you willing to lay aside the past with its glory and heart aches and humbly move into the future as servants? Are you willing to fall before God and repent of an attitude which is anything less than the mind of Christ the Suffering Servant?

Dream with me of what that could look like? Not vision of grandeur or institutional adulation, but people laying down their lives in loving service to one another.

Read another study about ants

Will it be accurately said of you and of this Community of Faith- "No Reserves," "No Retreats" and "No Regrets?"