

Selflessness, Self-Denial, and the Supremacy of Christ

Text: Philippians 1:12-24

Introduction:

Last week, we explored the miserable condition of our hearts, the need for its regeneration and transformation through Pastor Jonathan Abraham's sermon. Speaking about the state of our hearts. One of these miserable challenges is the desire to always put ourselves first in many matters of life. // This is my Starbucks mug collection. I collect to capture the moment and memories behind each place I have been to. It reminds me that I have been there, and I own that memory. But behind this thought is what we call the endowment effect.

Just like a child, if you shared your toy with a child, that kid would surely love it. But at the moment you try to ask the child to return the toy because that is his, then surely that kid will start to throw tantrums, cry out loud, and will never let go of that toy. That effect is natural for a child, but as we mature and older, we realize that we need to return the things that are not ours or we cannot simply own something that is not ours.

Endowment Effect or Psychological ownership is a theory that observes the sense of a person's valuing his or her own possession. This theory has been traced since the time of the Ancient Philosopher Aristotle; he said, "For most things are differently valued by those who have them and by those who wish to get them: what belongs to us, and what we give away, always seems very precious to us."

But because of the delicate heart that we have, this thought of owning something, making ourselves the center of everything for selfish gains, and entitlement has been a product of a marred view of self-identity, value, and purpose. We just want to put ourselves first. Just as how pop culture portrays and promotes self-love. I mean there is nothing wrong about loving yourself and valuing your life but as a Christian, I think—and biblically speaking, God calls us to go beyond this state.

Background:

Speaking about this predicament; there is someone in the Bible who has denied himself and has given up his selfish ambition for the sake of others' interests. Who is this person? This was apostle Paul.

Looking back, our passage today in the book of Philippians is a letter of encouragement. Hearing that, it seems that there is nothing special with it. Well... Not unless we see it from the perspective of where he wrote this letter. He wrote this letter in prison. Yes, he was in the moment of his imprisonment when he wrote this letter of encouragement. To add, he actually said "joy" or "rejoice" almost twenty times (16 times to be exact); reminding them about their joy in Christ and to rejoice despite the circumstances and hardships of life.

In this sermon, we will learn how a Christian—exemplified both in the lives of Paul and Christ—ought to shape selflessness and self-denial by putting others first and manifesting the supremacy of Christ in our lives.

Main Idea:

Selflessness: To Advance the Gospel of Christ

Despite the status of Paul being imprisoned, he made sure that it is not about himself, or his situation that will be seen but rather how God—in providence—is in control of everything. Have you been to prison? Well, I have been to prison several times. (oooh not that I am an ex-convict) I was there assigned as a psychotherapist and doing my duty as a chaplain. I have seen the state of prisoners inside the jail in the Philippines specifically Manila, Makati, and Quezon City jail plus Parañaque and Muntinlupa. (Here's the picture of me with the Wardens and asst Wardens of BJMP).

Again, even amid that gloomy atmosphere, compared with today's prisons, prisons during the time of Paul are messier, more miserable, and chaotic. But look at how Paul perceived this kind of situation in his life. In verses 12-14, Paul did not think about himself nor his state but rather the glorious news that the Gospel of Christ is being advanced even inside his prison. The guards were hearing about Christ. This was not the only case that Paul acted in this manner.

Remember the conversion of the jailer in Acts 16:29-34, instead of Paul and Silas escape after the earthquake, they stayed and shared the salvation story with this jailer. What happened? In verse 33, *"At that hour of the night, the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized."*

Oh, priorities, how joyful it is if only we can always put Christ and his gospel first in our lives. Pastor, "I am sorry; I am busy." Pastor, "I am sorry, I need to search myself first; I will do soul searching." You cannot search the real state of your soul apart from Christ and his Word.

Despite the differences in how Christians proclaim Christ, Paul stated in verse 18 of our passage, *"What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, **Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.**"* I cannot just keep this joy inside me that one of our bible study groups has been supporting in church planting and missions. With a massive prayer, pray with me, church, that before the end of this year, we will have the first church planting of UCBC—our daughter church. Again, **I challenge you to be selfless when it comes to the advancement of the kingdom of God.**

Self-denial: To Live and Die for Christ

This joy in Paul's heart was genuine because there is something transcendent about it. Something eternal. A joy that is not finite nor temporary. I agree that every time we have a celebration, it brings joy to our fellowship. But afterward, it will only be a memory. Unlike hearing someone proclaimed Christ to someone, or invited a friend to our church, or even discipling a person towards maturity then that kind of joy goes beyond temporal happiness. You are investing in eternal matters. Your investments in this material world can be lost, broken, or forgotten. But in these eternal things, we are talking about souls being saved, these are the real joy that will last forever and ever.

Hearing all the sad news last week, people dying and being unwell, makes me anxious and stay late at night thinking and reflecting how short life is. A friend of mine, in his late 30s, is now with the Lord. Another member of the church in Baguio, she just turned fifty, and now with our Lord too. We know someone, a family, a friend, or even a relative that has now in the presence of our Creator.

As Christians, we do celebrate their lives because we know they are already in heaven and experiencing the ultimate joy that we all wait for. Like Paul, being beaten, imprisoned, and mocked—he has longed to “die” and be with Christ because it will be a greater favor for him. Richard Sibbes noted this attitude as breathtaking; he said, “[Paul] knows that Christ is wiser than he; therefore he resigns himself to his disposal, resolving, if he lives, he lives to the Lord, and if he dies, he dies to the Lord (Rom 14:8); that so, whether he live or die, he may be the Lord’s.” (read 19-22)

Why did I say that my second point is self-denial? Look at verses 23-24, *“I am hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. **But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.**”*

God calls us to submit to His will and surrender our wills to His will. Indeed, we have free will. But if keep depending on our own free will, it will never progress nor lead us further. Denial of ourselves is putting the interest of others over our personal interests (read the essay on our bulletin). Practically speaking, I know we are thinking about our own safety, but let us also think about the safety of our others nowadays. I believe we all have personal preferences, views, and reasons, but think about others’ standpoints as well. I know sometimes this claim of ours based on shallow reasoning has influenced our minds and made us think narrowly, again, think about the others too.

Both sides, encourage but do not impose nor overrule someone’s will, likewise, listen and see it from other’s perspective, think about others situations not just of yourself. Sometimes, it is easy for us to judge with our biased mindset. Remind yourself, am I having the *mind of Christ*?

Paul desired to be with Christ soon because it will be a greater favor but he gave up his will and submitted to the plans of God. Submit your will to God. Listen and pray, be prudent, participate in it.

Supremacy of Christ

With all these characters portrayed by Paul, where did he learn these things? The answer is Jesus Christ. Paul started and ended in this passage making the glory of Christ the core reason (11, 26). Why Jesus? Did Christ demonstrate selflessness and self-denial?

1. Christ emptied himself (kenosis) – Philippians 2:1-11
2. Christ was willing to give up his life for his friend. “17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” John 10:17-18;
 - a. 16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. (1 John 3:16)

- b. John 3:16-17
- 3. Christ submitted to the will of the Father rather than His will.
 - a. 42 “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”
43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. 45 When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. (Luke 22:42-45)
- 4. Christ suffered for the sake of our salvation.
 - a. The Suffering Servant - Isaiah 53
 - b. Scourged - Matt. 27:26
 - c. Beaten - Luke 22:63-64
 - d. Spit upon - Matt. 27:30
 - e. Beard Plucked from His Face - Isaiah 50:6
 - f. Mocked - Matt. 27:26-29
 - g. Stripped Naked - Matt. 27:35
 - h. Nailed to the Cross - Matt. 27:38; John 20:25

Conclusion:

Learning today, the attitude of Paul both the selflessness and self-denial were all motivated and driven by the supremacy of Christ in his life. If only we really let Christ sit on the thrones of our hearts; if only we can put Christ and others first in our deeds; if only we think less of ourselves and think more about the interests of others, only then, we can truly experience true eternal joy in our hearts.

There is joy in submission; there is joy in putting others first; there is so much joy in having Christ and letting Him govern your life. Let us pray.

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