

Lockdown Letter 2 Philippians ch2 The Example Set by Jesus

What makes a minister happy?

Lots of people coming to church regularly? Yes, that's certainly a start.

People earnestly praying and eager to read and learn more from the Bible?
Definitely!

Probably the greatest joy we have is to witness God at work in a person's life. When someone comes and tells us they have become a Christian, they have decided to trust and follow the Lord Jesus, well that's almost as good as it gets.

But that is closely followed by when we see members of our congregation *continue* and *grow* in the faith, united, humbly obedient and working enthusiastically together for our Saviour.

In this 1st century 'thank you letter' to his old parish in Philippi the Apostle Paul has testified that he is already filled with joy when he considers the fellowship he shares with these Philippian believers. 'You folk make me feel so happy and thankful' he writes, 'now make my joy *complete!*'

And how are they to do this? By realising more and more, day by day what God has given them through Jesus and responding with humility and love. Here is a good pattern for every Christian in every time and place – remember what we have been given and show our gratitude in joyful service!

Do we appreciate what God has done for us and what we are becoming through Jesus and the help of the Holy Spirit? Are we encouraged, comforted by the redeeming love of our Saviour Who humbled Himself to die on a cross for our sins that we might be saved and live as God's children? Do we sense God working in us according to His good purpose?

Are we grateful for the presence and help of His Spirit? Are we sensitive to His prompting us to tenderness and compassion, pulling us together in mutual concern? Do we realise He is equipping us as ambassadors for Christ and the Gospel, leading us in holy living and witness as we share this 'word of life' to each new generation?

Aware of what the Lord has already done for us, we should be eager and willing to co operate more and more with what He is still doing in us. We're not finished yet! We are a 'work in progress'! Every day we pray, 'Thy will be done on earth as in heaven' we should be looking and listening for Him showing us new opportunities to grow and serve, as individuals and as a

fellowship. We are different people with different backgrounds and personalities but we share one heavenly Father, one Saviour and are indwelt by the same Holy Spirit. One clear aspect of God's will revealed in the New Testament is that we live and serve *together*.

Let's think of it like this:

We are to be **united with Christ** in love. This connection with Jesus also binds us to each other. We are united to Him. He unites us to each other as His followers. He loves us and commands us to love one another for His sake. This fellowship is already a reality through the work of the Spirit, regenerating us into one worldwide family of faith. Paul is merely instructing us to practise what already exists when he writes, 'be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose'.

We are to welcome, cherish and nurture the love of Jesus being sown in our hearts by His Spirit. Everything else flows from this.

And here's the next thing, we are to be **humble like Christ** to serve. The eternal Son of God, co-creator of the universe did not resist being made a helpless human baby, a person subject to hunger, sorrow and pain like the rest of us. He knelt like a slave and washed His disciples' feet. He submitted to the most agonising and humiliating execution to provide atonement and forgiveness for people lost in the worship of themselves.

Paul says our attitude must be like His. 'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility consider others better than yourselves' he writes, 'Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others.' Motivated by the self-sacrificing love of our Master we are to copy His attitude of living our lives as humble service for the good of everyone.

Noting thirdly that this is a practical matter. It requires action. We are to be **working for Christ** in the world. Paul says we are to 'work out' the implications of our salvation. Our humble gratitude before God must issue in works of conscientious service and exceptional kindness and generosity. The apostle says the local Christians are to be like 'stars in the universe', lights in the dark, offering life in Christ to the 'crooked and depraved generation' around us. Communities should come to honour the name of Jesus Christ because of the benefits wrought by His followers!

This happened in the years after Paul wrote this 'letter from lockdown'. At first Romans mocked and persecuted the Christians but in time they came to respect them and the Lord they proclaimed. Much cruelty came to an end and much charity was begun. And many more chose to trust and follow Jesus the Christ. May this be true for us in our time and place as we follow the instruction of God's Word today. And to our Lord and Master be the glory! Amen