We are shown how to live

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[0:00] Number four, at the cross we are shown how to live, which actually seems a strange sort! of title, seeing as the cross was a place of death. But to show us how to live as Christians! is exactly why Paul wrote this section, chapter 2 verses 1 to 11 in his letter to the Philippians.

If you've got Bibles and you want to turn to that, that's fine. If not, the verse is going to come up as we look at it. But before we start that, I'm going to start where Paul starts, because Paul knows when he wrote this that what he was going to say was not going to be easy to listen to.
He wasn't going to tell them something simple to do. It was going to be tough. And so he starts with encouragement. He says, therefore, if you have any encouragement, and the if there isn't a question, there's no doubt in Paul's mind, okay? So you can sort of ignore the if. If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship or participation in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then what he's going to tell us later on, how we should live.
You see, Paul starts, and we're going to start this morning, reminding us that as Christians, we are in Christ. We are united with Christ. Now that means so, so much. But what it does mean here in this context is that Jesus will be with us in this tough task. He has done it before.
It's going to be his example that we're going to be encouraged to follow. And he's going to be with us. And that is real encouragement in our Christian lives. Paul also says that we're loved by God.
[2:12] That means, amongst other things, that I can be comfortable in the presence of God. And even more amazing, God is comfortable in my presence. He loves me. God loves me. He loves you as well.

He wants me to live the very best Christian life I can. But because I'm in Christ, and as a Christian, we're all in Christ, God will still accept me, even if I try and don't quite get it right all the time.
And do you know what? That's a real comfort to know that. And Paul goes on to say, you're not in this on your own. It's a joint venture in participation with the Holy Spirit. And that's what fellowship is. Doing something together with God. That's real fellowship.
So, with this encouragement ringing in our ears, as it were, how should we live? Well, Paul goes on. Verse 2.
Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and one of mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourself.
[3:41] Not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others. This, as Christians, is how we should live.

But it's hard, isn't it? That's hard. Especially as it's pretty much the opposite, the complete opposite of our present-day culture that we live in.
Probably every present-day culture there's ever been, actually. See, in our present-day culture, it's characterised by division and difference. It's true in the world. Unfortunately, it can be true in the church, too.
But as Christians, we should be characterised by, as it says in verse 2, by a oneness. Now, that's not a uniformity of outward characteristics, like the clothes that we wear, or the words that we use, or the practices that we follow, or even the songs that we sing.
But it's a oneness that comes from having one mind. And that, I think, is the mind of Christ. We're going to be encouraged in a minute to have the same attitude or mind as Christ.
[5:03] That's where our oneness comes from. And our oneness comes from knowing the love and acceptance of the Father. That's a one love, sharing it with one another. It's a oneness that comes from joining in the purposes of the one Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

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It's a oneness that actually values differences, not fears them. Our culture is also characterised by self-promotion and self-worth. Or, as Paul puts it in verse 3, selfish ambition and vain conceit.
It's in our culture. But, to be honest, it's just below the surface in us all. I'm sure we've all felt that we've been taken for granted or ignored before, and I bet it's hurt.
And I'm sure we've all found fault in another person's words or behaviours, which, if only subconsciously, has made us feel a bit better about ourselves.
And perhaps we have found an excuse, a reason that explains away our own failings. You know, I only said that. I know I shouldn't have said that, but I was tired.
[6:15] It had been a busy day, and, well, it just came out. We make excuses for ourselves to make us feel better. That's, I don't know whether that's vain conceit or selfish ambition.

A bit of vain conceit, I think. But, as Christians, as a Christian, I should be characterised, as Paul tells us in verse 3, characterised by valuing others above oneself.
And thirdly, our culture today is characterised by self-interest. You know, not in my backyard is a well-known response to, well, almost anything.
But as a Christian, I should be characterised by seeking the interests of others. That's verse 4. Meeting their needs. Not just my needs, perhaps even above my needs.
But I don't live like that. Certainly not always. Do you? The trouble is, other people, even other Christians, don't think like I do.
[7:27] Which means, of course, they're wrong. Or at least lacking insight or maturity, perhaps. And to be honest, humble as I am, there are times when I need to be listened to.

And appreciated. And yes, to be honest, in certain things I probably do know best. And, come to think about it, I do have legitimate interests.
That will, at times, outweigh your interests. Now, apart from confession time in a sermon like that, you'll probably never hear me actually say those things.
Certainly not in church. But, boy, have I thought them. And I've certainly felt them. And they affect the way I live.
They affect the relationships that I have. And from the laughs that I got a few seconds ago, I suspect it's probably the same with you too. So, we need help.
[8:35] Because just telling us what to do, good though it is, and let's face it, those verses are excellent. They're great. They're in the Bible.

They must be. But it's not going to be enough. We need to look at Jesus. Focusing on the attitudes, the mindset, his mind, his attitudes that he had on his journey to the cross.
From his pre-incarnate glory as God the Son, through his incarnation and birth in Bethlehem, through his life and onto his death on the cross.
Because, as Paul said in verse 5, your attitude, my attitude as well, should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.
So, let's spend a little bit of time looking at Jesus. Verse 6. Paul tells us, He who was truly God did not cling onto the rights and privileges of being God.
[10:08] This was his mindset. I will not hold on to what I have because of who I am. And in many ways, this is the starting point.

It was for Christ Jesus. It is for you and for me. Am I flexible enough in my thinking, in my mind, in my attitudes, so as to be ready for a change?
A downward change, even. A downward change of my position and my possessions, so that God's will can be done. All the while trusting in the goodness of God.
How do I consider myself and my situation? Is it something primarily to be used for my own advantage? Or something I'm willing to let go of for the benefit of others?
It's hard to be willing to let go of what you have. But that's the attitude we need if we're going to follow the example of Jesus.
[11:18] And Paul goes on in verse 7. He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

That's being made a human being, becoming a man. Jesus willingly stripped himself. And that's another valid translation of made himself nothing.
Jesus stripped himself of all the prerogatives of being God. You know, things like giving orders and being in charge. And he willingly became a servant.
Following orders. Doing only what he was told to do by God the Father. It's hard to give up control.

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It's hard when people don't do what you want them to do. Especially when you know what's best for them. It's even harder giving up control over your own lives. I hate being told what to do.
[12:26] I'm getting worse as I get older. I was on holiday with Hazel last week down in Cornwall. And I was driving, we were driving along.

And Hazel said, I think you need to turn right here. I knew she was right. I mean the sat-nav told me she was right as well.
But I did not like being told. Alright? Yes, I know, I know. Okay? A tiny little, tiny little example.
But I expect you're the same. Alright? We don't like being told what to do. It's hard being a servant. Under orders.
And not giving orders. But Jesus had this mindset. It's, I'm not here to give orders. Said Jesus. Or thought Jesus.
[13:23] I'm here to take orders. And it's, it involves being willing to be thought of as not important.

Perhaps even not thought of at all. It's willing almost to be made nothing. And that's the attitude we need if we're to follow the example of Jesus.
Right. Verse 8. And Christ Jesus being found in appearance as a man. That means as becoming a human being.
He humbled himself. Now, humility is one of those words that's often difficult to really get a grasp of. Humility is not about having a low opinion about oneself. Humility is based on having a very secure and correct opinion of oneself.
[14:33] You know, Jesus, he knew he was the son of God. No doubt in his mind. But he wasn't always thinking about himself as God the son.

And therefore, deserving allegiance and obedience and preferential treatment and devotion, etc. He didn't think about himself as God the son because he was secure in that knowledge.
He knew it. But he humbled himself. Thinking of himself as a servant. So what was on his mind was not himself, but his father's will and the needs of the people he had come to serve.
And so, we, as Christians, if you're a Christian this morning, we can be secure in our knowledge of being valued children of God because that is what we are.
It tells us in, I think, 1 John 3. Right? We can be secure in our knowledge of being valued children of God so we don't have to think about it all the time.
[15:47] We should have that same humble attitude as Jesus if we're to follow his example. And verse 8 continues, and he became, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death, on a cross, which is where this series is all about.

As Jesus went to the cross, what was on his mind controlling his actions? Well, I suggest two things.
Firstly, it was obeying the will of his father. And secondly, it was meeting your needs, meeting my needs, meeting the needs of others.
Why death on a cross? Because there and there only could he meet our deepest needs. It was on the cross that he became my substitute.
We looked at that three weeks ago. There, taking the punishment of my sin, which I deserve, whilst letting me walk free in his righteousness, fully accepted by God.
[16:59] It was on the cross he became my expiation. I think we looked at that two weeks ago. Washing away my guilt, the guilt of the things wrong that I have done.

Washing them away. Washing away my shame, the shame that makes me feel unlovable in the eyes of God and others. And it was on the cross that he became my victory.
We saw that last week. Victory over Satan and sin and death. At the cross, our victory was won. So we have no need to fear these things.
We have no need to fear Satan or sin or death. Their power is broken and there's coming a time when their presence will be no more. All this and more I could not do for myself.
All this and more I did not deserve. but Jesus met my needs on the cross.
[18:05] So let's quickly recap. What was the attitude of Christ on his way to the cross and on the cross? I called it a flexible open-handed attitude.

Not clinging on to what he had but willing to give what he had up for us. It was an obedient submissive attitude.
Willingly giving up the right to have his will done and willingly taking up the life of a servant content to do the will of the father.

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And it was a humble attitude. Knowing exactly who he was but not thinking about himself. Rather again putting the will of the father and the needs of others your needs my needs first.
I need to be like that. You need to be like that to follow the example of Jesus on the cross. Now although Philippians chapter 2 verses 2 to 8 describes what we as Christians should be like.
[19:24] How we should live. I'm not going to leave you with that challenge. I've struggled hard with the end of this sermon because I didn't want to end there.

Because I can't do that. You know I don't know how long I've been a Christian. I'm not going to tell you. Alright I will.
Can I work it out? I don't know 56 years? Something like that? 53 years I think I've been a Christian. I can't do that.
And so I can't leave us here. And I think the apostle Paul knew this too. Because in the very next section of his letter he wrote in verse 12 continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. That's with a being reverent and sensitive before God. For it is God who works in you to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.
[20:32] That's in translation is clunky in English. I think and I will be corrected if I'm wrong at the end of the service hopefully. Well no hopefully not but I think what Paul is saying here is give living the Christian life your best shot but always remember and always rely on the fact that it's only as God is at work in you that you will be able to do it.

So as we come to the end how does God work in us? I think that's the wrong question to ask at the end of a sermon because it's huge isn't it?
I mean God works in us in lots of ways and all the time. But this morning I would just say go back to verse 1 and you will see that he works in us through encouragement reminding us that we are in Christ so that when God the Father looks at you and looks at me trying and failing to follow the example of Jesus what God the Father sees is Jesus because we're in him.
so meditate on that work that round in your mind for a few days to see what that means and then live your life in the light of the gospel.
And God works in us through comforting us day by day with the reality of his accepting and forgiving love. I said this before but it's true.
[22:16] God values you. You only have to think about the verses we've been looking at that tell us what God in Christ has done for you.

To know that. Meditate on the love of God. Chew it around in your mind. Keep doing it until you can feel it.
And then live your life in the light of the gospel. And thirdly Paul tells us that God is at working us through the participation of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
Working in us and through us. Making us more like Jesus. Do you know that's part of his job description. And he knows what he's doing.
So follow his lead, his promptings and then live your life in the light of the cross. a few final thoughts.
[23:20] There is and this is good news, there is a final future exaltation. In verse nine of this passage we read, Paul writes therefore God exalted him.

It was true of Christ who went through his downward journey from equality with God to death on the cross. It's true of us as Christians who are in Christ.
He was made high and lifted up because of the will of the Father and it's the will of the Father that you too will be lifted up.
not because you have lived a good life following the example of Jesus, although that's a very good thing to do, but he'll do it because you're in Christ and what he's done for Christ he'll do for you.
And my final, final point is it's all to the glory of God. Section, verse 11, which is the end of the section in that letter, Paul writes that it was all to the glory of God the Father.
[24:38] You see, it's not about you. It's not even about me. It's always and ever and only about the glory of God.

I think I've said this before here, but the word glory at its root means wait. Some substance, if you like. And I've always, I don't know whether I'm correct in this, but I've always thought of God's glory as being the felt presence of God.
And do you know what? As God works in us, as we participate in the work of the Holy Spirit in us and through us, as we live with Christ on the cross as our example, God will be felt.

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God will be glorified. I'm going to ask the band if they'd like to come back. And while the band are very quietly making their way back to the stage, I'm just going to pray.
Jesus, you are worthy of every song we could sing. Jesus, you are worthy of all the praise we could bring, ever bring.
[26:07] Jesus, you are worthy of every breath we could ever breathe. Oh, help us to live for you. Amen.

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