

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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The Mindset of Christ

Joshua Symonette

Two memories surfaced in my mind this week, the first was when I was about 10 years old, my dad took over a church and became the pastor of Covenant Baptist Church, a church that was about a few miles south of where I grew up in Miami, a place called Florida City. And, my sister and I hated that church. Not because it was a bad church, but we were leaving our friends, it wasn't that exciting. So at first, you know, we just weren't really a feeling this move. And so we got to this church and there were quite a few kids who were a part of this church. And we were a traditional Baptist church, so we had Sunday school before church. And then as church was going on, most of the kids, we were sitting in the back of the church and, you know, we would do what kids do. We were making noise and being a disruption. So my mom decided that she was going to basically launch a kid's church, something that we didn't have, wasn't as sophisticated as what we do here at NCC Kids, but she didn't want the kids to be a distraction. So she decided she was going to spring into action and create this kid's church and basically become our kids and youth pastor all in one. Now, that was a cool idea, but it actually was frowned upon and it actually was controversial because in the church context that I grew up in, that was not the role of the first lady of the church that was not the role of the pastor's wife. She was supposed to be on the front row of the church supporting her husband. But my mom said none of that; I got to handle these kids. And so, as a result, kids started loving coming to church and our kids' church grew. And, then I got to see my mom in a different light, in a different role. And she had these gifts in ways of keeping us engaged and keeping us involved. And you know, we would have been robbed of an awesome opportunity, an awesome privilege to gather together and to learn and grow in our faith as little ones. And we would have been robbed of the gifts and the vision that God had put into my mom. And I was thinking about that this week and I was reflecting upon what would our world be like? What would our society be like if women would have stayed in their place and they would not have stepped out and offered their gifts and their vision and their talent and share that with the world? I think we all can conclude that we are the beneficiaries of that of both women known and unknown who took their gifts and their visions and brought them to the forefront. And yes, I'm highlighting that because it is women's history month and this week was also International Women's Day. But I'm also highlighting it because this essentially is what Jesus was all about. Jesus was a liberator giving value to the outcasts and the oppressed and the overlooked. He was also a unifier, restoring us back to God and each other.

The second story or memory, I had that I was thinking about this week was when I was a little bit younger, so younger than 10. I had this fascination with a cartoon call He-Man and for those of you, who don't know the premise of He-Man, Prince Adam was the main character and his alter ego was He-Man. And he was able to get this super human strength and power once he called upon the power of Grayskull, he would pull his sword up and called down this power and he would turn into this super human. He and his friends, were the defenders of Eternia? And he fought against this guy who employed, many evil forces called Skeletor. And so I love this cartoon because I saw myself in this cartoon. I was a very shy and I was a small kid, I didn't have a lot of confidence. And so, I wanted to be like, He-Man, he embodied everything that I wanted

to be. He was strong. He was powerful. He was dominant. This was also one of the reasons why I love other characters like Superman and Batman and the Flash. They had these powers, they had these gifts, they had these talents, these weapons that made them superior, that made them greater. And if I'm being honest, the real draw was towards superiority, not necessarily the gifts, like those were cool. And the gifts that they were given were actually supposed to benefit the communities that they were a part of. But that wasn't the thing that excited me. What excited me was I could be greater, I could be a superior, I could be the man if I had these sorts of gifts and talents.

And I was thinking about that this week, as we have been in this series called Better Together because how we pursue and elevate ourselves above others and we make ourselves supreme or superior is actually what makes it difficult in our relational dealings with one another. It makes it challenging at times for us to engage with one another. And we've seen the results of this in our society. We've seen racism and classism and sexism and nationalism and any other ism you want a name that really is all about being superior with one group or one idea or one thought above someone else's idea or thought or even group or gender.

I wanted to zoom in on this weekend because it's this kind of thinking that doesn't allow us to be better together. Why? Because this kind of thinking prioritizes our ego, our value, our worth above everyone else's. So there's this guy named Paul, some of you may have heard of him before. He is credited with writing the majority of the New Testament and he would write letters. And, he wrote a letter to this group of Christians in a place called Philippi several years ago. And, in Paul's writing, he's basically, in all of his letters that he's writing he's trying to help people understand who this Jesus guy really is and the ways that he modeled. And a lot of what he talked about was helping people understand that the pursuit of superiority or supremacy, which was very prevalent in the culture and in the society and the pursuit of being greater was not the way of Jesus. And so this particular letter to the group of Philippians is kind of what I want to zoom in on today, so, if you have a Bible, you can meet me in Philippians chapter number two, we'll zoom in there. If you don't have a Bible or an electronic device, don't worry, we won't leave you hanging; we'll have the words up on the screen. Hey, I'm going to read and ask that you would follow along with me starting in verse number one. Here we go. Before we even start, Paul says, therefore, so anytime you see a therefore in scripture, you need to know what it's there for. So, if you back up a little bit Paul is just talking to them about what it means to have their life be a reflection of the Gospel of Jesus. And then he goes and he says,

¹"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."

He says, make my joy complete because he's already excited about what he's hearing about the Christians in Philippi and what's going on with them and how they're growing in their faith. Continue to verse three. He says,

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: 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!"*

I love to just give a subject for this message this weekend, a simple subject, The Mindset of Christ, The Mindset of Christ. This letter that Paul has written to this group of Christians in Philippi was written around 68AD. Paul is actually in prison when he's writing this letter, there's a little bit of a dispute in terms of actually where he's in prison. But we also know that Philippi is a place that he's visited before, a place that he loves. If we go back to Acts, which is written by a guy named Luke, we see that Paul and a guy named Silas went and spent time there, probably helping to establish the church at Philippi. Now, Philippi was a Roman colony and the Christian community was said to be thriving there. And so Paul writes to them, there are really three things that he wants to talk to them about. He wants to tell them, hey, this is what's going on with me. I'm in prison, but I'm doing well. And then secondly, he wants to thank them for their support of him and thank them for how they're diligently pursuing Jesus. And then thirdly, he wants to encourage them on how they should live.

Now, if you take a little bit of time, which I hope you do, and you drilled down or you zoom in on this letter, this short letter that Paul has written, you can see one of the themes that jumps out of this letter is Paul talking about the mind. He's talking about the kind of mindset we need to have. Chapter number one, he's talking about growing in knowledge, depth of insight and discernment so that the Philippians can determine what is best and pure.

Then in chapter two, which we just read eight of those verses, he mentions the mind three times in just, those eight verses that we read. In chapter three, he talks about not having our mind on earthly things. And then chapter four, he talks about the peace of God guarding our heart and our mind.

So for the rest of the time that we have, I just want to spend a few moments unpacking what Paul is saying about the mindset of Christ and how this relates to this series that we've been in for the last six weeks called Better Together. Now, if you have to suddenly leave or a baby starts crying or you get a text or something comes up, let me just give you the whole point of the message right now just in case. Alright? Here's ultimately what I want you to know and some of you may already know, so it might be a reminder, so here it goes. When it comes to how we relate to one another, how we think alright, or our mindset is the biggest factor in terms of how we deal with it. It's the most critical factor, our mindset, how we think about ourselves, okay. And basically our mindset is what sets the tone with how we deal with one another. Let me just give you an example. So, I came across a study by this guy named David Dunning, who is a psychologist, from Cornell. And, David Dunning has done years and years of research on what he calls 'cause'. And in this journal in the year 2000, the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, this particular study that Dunning did, he came to this premise that Americans have a holier than thou

complex. Listen to what he said; he said, the average American thinks they are better than the average American. Now I know that shocking to y'all, I know you cannot believe it, I couldn't believe it either. But, here's what he said, throughout his research, and not just this one study that I just cited but, throughout his research, most people, he said, thought that they were above average and consistently ranked themselves higher in morality, in skills and intelligence.

And there was another article that was written last year, January, 2018 in Forbes and this was the title of the article. It said how could almost 50% of men think they are geniuses? I mean 'cause we think we are. This was according to a 2009 Okcupid poll, which also said that 30% of women thought that they were geniuses. So, when you do the statistical analysis there and you do the math, it basically suggests that half of us think that we are geniuses.

Now, Dunning in all of his research basically concludes this; how we think about ourselves is off. I mean, that's basically what he said. Like our self evaluation of who we are actually, it's like in our skewed a little bit, it's like way off. And here's the thing, when I said that, I'm sure some of you are really agreed like yeah, absolutely but you weren't thinking about yourself, you were thinking about someone else, which is actually David Dunning's point. The reason for that is there's a thing called illusory superiority. Now it's a condition of cognitive bias that says we overestimate our qualities and abilities in relation to others qualities and abilities. Now, here's the thing, I'm not a trained researcher yet. I'm not a trained scientist yet. But I think I can reasonably conclude that this kind of thinking cannot help our relationships with each other. It just can't be a positive factor. If for the most part I think that I'm better than you or I'm superior or I'm above you, how does that help us be in healthy relationship with each other?

So you think this guy Paul, who wrote this letter 2000 years ago, just about, is up to something like he's onto something here? I mean, I think so because it's really fascinating to me because Paul is not citing when he's telling the church at Philippi how they need to be engaged with one another and humility and needs to be the factor there like, he's not citing research, but he is aware of the human tendency. He is aware of the human mindset, so much so that Paul drills down on this kind of mindset several times to several churches within the New Testament writings. To the Christians in Rome, he says; don't think of yourself more highly than you should. To the Christians in Corinth, he says; don't say to one another, you don't need each other. To the Christians in Ephesus, he says; only speak things that build one another up. Paul is essentially saying his overall point is this, we're not better than each other. We're better with each other. This is what he's consistently saying and I was told if you keep seeing something over and over is probably important, you should probably pay attention to it.

Paul is really saying our interactions with each other should be a reflection of unity. Well, why Paul? The reason why this is so important, the reason why Paul is pounding this, the reason why he's continuing to drill down on this as he's writing these letters to these churches is because they're Christians, they are Christ followers and this is and was what Jesus was all about. It's what he was all about. So then the only response, the only response to this, the only action that makes sense is if you are going to truly follow the way of Christ. Well Paul, he kinda lays out what you have to do. We read it in the first few verses and if we started at verse three, he says,

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.*

That's the preamble. Then he, then he drills down on what that is tied to cause that that just sounds good and maybe it's a good idea, but then he goes further and he connects it to the mindset of Jesus. Verse five, he says, when you deal with one another, have the mindset of Jesus, then this is when it starts to get problematic. In verse six, he says, who being in very nature, God didn't use that to his own advantage. Oh no, it gets worse. Verse seven, he says, rather he made himself nothing. The King James Version says of no reputation taking on the nature of a servant. I just think that's the conflict of interest right there.

If we back up to verse six, who, Jesus being in very nature, God didn't use that to his own advantage. That just sounds like a bad idea. But, isn't our world all about creating and leveraging advantages for personal gain? I mean, that's what it's all about and we're conditioned to embrace this and our metrics support it and promote it. Oh, and by the way, we build networks and associations to promote what we believe is supreme or superior. Now we have liberties to do that in this country, which is great. I celebrate that. But, I think we can see that the my way of thinking is superior to your way of thinking approach doesn't work. I think we can see examples of that that I don't need to name for you. And, here's the thing, our inclination when we're looking at one another and we're engaging with one another, when we're you know, dealing with one another, our inclination often is we don't look at the value in something or someone to celebrate. That's usually not our inclination. Our inclination is to look at or value something or someone to criticize because the criticism really puts us in a superior position, makes our opinion superior, makes our thought process, our group or whatever we're associated superior. So when we criticize, it's a way for us to one up.

Then verse seven says, Jesus, rather than taking advantage of the fact that he's, I mean, he's God rather he made himself nothing. Nobody's writing books on that. Listen, building our brand and our reputation is what we're conditioned to do. We're conditioned to make ourselves something, that's what we're conditioned to do. If you drill down on that little phrase, make yourself nothing in the Greek, it really translates into make empty, is literally what it means.

I was fortunate enough to have a couple of opportunities to hang out with Dr. John Perkins. If you don't know who Dr. John Perkins is, you should Google him; you should read some of his work. He's a modern day civil rights leader, activist, really a person who embodies reconciliation and we did an interview with him a couple of years ago. We got a chance to go down to Mississippi and I remember Dr. Perkins saying, and he's in his eighties, by the way, and he's still writing and he's still speaking and he just technically retired, but he's still doing what he's doing. He said, I want to die empty. And I remember reflecting on how powerful that statement was because most of us want to die rich. We want to leave with monuments to ourselves. Yeah, it'd be nice to leave things to our kids and family members and all that, but that's really not about them, that's about us. That's really how we view it. But I remember as I reflected on that, Dr. Perkins, who is a serious follower of Jesus understood that him pouring himself out, him giving himself away is really the way of Christ and that makes him rich.

Here's the thing, the selfish ambition mindset says, I want to be more for me, but the humility mindset says, I want to be more for you. Now, Jesus, who is the Son of God taking on human form, he really has access to all power, he makes himself nothing because he didn't come to be superior, he already was, he didn't come to be that. And if he came to be that, I'm sure if we have any understanding of the, of the Bible story and what Jesus did, I'm sure all of us will have some recommendations on how he could do that better. But Jesus actually came to model for us, humility because that is how we experience the fullness of our relationship with God and with each other. That is how we experience the fullness of life. But if we are full of ourselves, it really ain't much room for much more, God, let alone anybody else.

So here's the thing, you know, if we decide that we want to embrace the me mindset, you know, just do me. That's cool, I mean that's, that's fine. There are actually benefits in success related to that. But here's the thing the benefits, the success, the pursuit of, of being greater will never be enough because that stuff runs out at some point, people break your records. You know, at some point people don't even care, it doesn't amount to much. And then the flip side of that is we're actually wired for relationship with one another. That actually is what fulfills us. I mean, look at all, if you rewind all the way back to the beginning of this Bible story that when man was created, it said that he was walking with God and God was actually giving him an assignment to name all the animals. And I mean, he just accomplished a great deal. But even after all that God said is it's not good for you to be alone.

Our constant elevation of our interests over others, it doesn't work for long if we're going to have healthy and life giving relationships with one another. But it's the mindset of humility, not the way that Webster defines it, which is very negative by the way. It's not the way that our culture defines it, which is very misunderstood. And, some of us have kind of grabbed onto this humility thing because we realize like it can help our bottom line, you know? No, that's not it. It's not about being a doormat. It's not about being weak. It's not about being soft. It's not even about this projection of false humility that where we put ourselves down lower than we should. It's not any of those things is simply what Jesus did and what he was about serving. Paul said he made himself a servant. This is what he did. And he bore the burdens of others.

So let me see if I can land this plane for us this weekend and bring this to a close. Pride is often the reason why we struggle in relationships with one another. The very nature of pride is about self. So how can we be better together if we think we're better than each other? How does that work? I've never been great at math, but that math just doesn't add up.

If you want to resource on this and you really want to drill down and read more on this, which I really, really encourage you to do because, this humility thing, it's really complex, it's fascinating and it's not easy to do. But Andrew Murray, write that name down, Andrew Murray, you just Google Andrew Murray humility, he's got a couple of books that he's written. And Andrew Murray talks about how pride is the root of every evil, which that didn't originate from him, I think some of us had heard that before, but he says pride and humility are the two master powers, the two kingdoms, in strife for the eternal possession of man. Pride has all of man until man has all from Christ. And what he's talking about is having total dependence on God, which is very challenging because our world promotes independence, which is the antithesis of what being in a relationship with Jesus is all about. And it is humility that makes room for the spirit of God to fill

us. So, if we're making ourselves empty, which is what humility is about, it leaves room for God to fill us. And if God is filling us and we're not trying to fill ourselves, it's going to be a little bit better life.

Paul and Andrew Murray, I mean they're just echoing what Jesus has already said. And Jesus said, unless you deny yourself, you cannot be my disciple. You can't be more definitive than that. Now, you know, denying yourself is hard. I mean, you supposed to be shopping for apples and grapes and you're in the bakery section. You know it's hard. But we have to deny self in order for the humility mindset to kick in. And that's not something that we can really do on our own. I love the way Andrew Murray talks about this. He said, that has to be an intentional pursuit because you can't just decide you're going to do that and it happens, you've got to intentionally pursue that.

And ultimately here's what the humility mindset says and this is nice and pithy, but it's not this easy. The humility mindset says we is more important than me. Just try thinking about that regularly as you work, as you drive, as you deal with difficult people. Yeah, just try it. It's very, very difficult. But Jesus, who embodied all power, humbled himself. He's the greatest example of what this is and all Paul is saying is that is the mindset that we need to have if we're going to have not just great relationship or positive relationship with each other, which Jesus model, but relationship with God, this, fullness of reconciliation to God and to each other. If that is going to happen, we have to have the mindset of Christ and humble ourselves and realize that we're no better than each other.

Let's pray. God, we thank you so much for who you are. Thank you for how you challenged us this weekend with this letter that Paul has written almost 2000 years ago that's still very relevant today. We can look around in our culture, we can look in the mirror and see ourselves and see the pursuit that we have to not just be more, but to be more because we're pursuing some measurement that doesn't even count, that won't even amount to much in the grand scheme of things. God, help us to deny ourselves, as you said, we can only do that if we are tapping in to the power that you offer us through relationship with you, through relationship with Jesus. So God, I thank you for how you're leading and guiding us and how you are going to fill us as we make ourselves empty. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.