

# Cross Bearer

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, thank you so much, Katie. Thank you so much indeed, folks. Let me encourage you to have your Bibles open at Philippians chapter 2. I don't think any exaggeration to say that what we've just heard are some of the most cherished verses in the whole Bible for Christians across the globe, down the ages, as they give us a beautiful portrait of Jesus Christ. And so I hope that we feast on these truths this evening, and at the most difficult of times, that they would stir our affections for our great God this evening as we come before his word. So let me just pray really quickly, and then we'll get into this tonight. Heavenly Father, we love you, and we thank you so much, Lord, for the good news of Christmas, of the coming of Jesus, your Son into the world.

And so, Father, I pray tonight that as we spend time in your words, Father, that we would hear your voice, and that your Spirit would come and apply these truths and comfort us as we feast on them this evening. Lord, we pray and give our time to you, Lord, in Jesus' precious and in his worthy name we pray. Amen. Folks, picture the scene. Okay, you find yourself at the front of a stage, and it's news to you, but it looks like you're being asked to give some sort of speech.

Okay, and you lift your eyes for a moment, and you look out, and hold on a minute, there's actually an audience here to hear you speak. And as you begin to look more closely at the audience and who's there, you all of a sudden begin to think to yourself, do you know what? I recognize these people. Okay, I recognize these faces. Do you know what? There's my secondary school physics teacher. What on earth is he doing here? And a few seats along from him, there's your distant aunt, right? You last saw her when you were six, and now she lives on the other side of the world, and you think, what is she doing here? And then you scan your eyes further along the rows of people, and a few seats along from her, there's the dentist that you used to go to when you lived in your old house. And what is it that brings all these people together? You think to yourself, what is going on here? And all of a sudden, there's a hush in the room, and the lights are dimmed, and all eyes are on you, and people are expecting you to speak. People want to hear what you've got to say, except here's the problem. You have no idea what it is you're supposed to say. And you open your mouth, and you try and say something because the awkwardness is tangible. You want to say anything, only to find that you open your mouth, and you cannot physically get the words out of your mouth. And to compound the sense of absolute agony, you look out, and people are laughing at you, hysterically, uncontrollably.

And you think to yourself, I've not even said anything. There's no funnies in my speech that they could laugh at. What on earth are they laughing at? And you look down, and horror of horrors. Do you know why people are laughing? Because you've got no clothes on. Now, hands in the air, who's ever had a dream like that? Okay, I have. Many a time. Experts call that, I don't know if you know this, experts call that the humiliation dream. I don't know if you knew that? You can have that one for free, the humiliation dream. And apparently, it's one of the most common types of dreams that people in our world have. Now, I've heard of lots of people, myself included, who have had a dream like that.

But what I've never heard, I've never met a person who has chosen to live something like that out in real life. Right? Who would choose to be humiliated? Who would choose to be laughed at? Who would choose to be exposed? Who would choose to be mocked? Who would choose to be vulnerable? And yet, the stunning truth of the passage this evening is that here is the God who made himself humiliated.

[ 4 : 29 ] Here is the son who chose to humiliate himself. And what Philippians chapter 2 does, stunningly, is it takes us almost behind the scenes in Bethlehem. And it shows us everything that the baby in the angel represents. Okay? And so, as we look at this this evening, we're going to go right to the heart of who our God is. Okay? Of what he's like, of what he's about, of what he's

prepared to do, and why this God is willing to do it. And here's a little reflection for you as we start. Okay? Maybe you're here tonight, and you're feeling like 2020 has just kicked the stuffing out of you. Okay? Alex and I, we got the kids down after watching, she's known as Nicola, isn't she? Watching Nicola last night, listened, got the kids down. We sat in the living room, and we sat in silence for about 15-20 minutes, didn't even want to speak. Not because we'd fallen out, but because we just didn't have the heart to face the truth of what these next few weeks are going to look like. Okay? Sitting there feeling like a puffer jacket, somebody's torn a hole in us, and gradually, one by one, the feathers have all come out. Okay? Question. Where do we go in those times? Where do we run in those times? You know, I was watching an interview this week with the actor

Keanu Reeves. Okay? You know Keanu Reeves, the guy from Speed, one of my favorite films when I was young. Bill and Ted. Okay? You can YouTube it when you go home. Right? Keanu Reeves asked in an interview what 2020 had taught him. Right? Here's what he said. He said, what he's learned is that he needs to work hard on his optimism. Okay? Hard on his optimism. I don't know about you, but I listened to him say that, and I thought of the year that's just passed, and I thought to myself, that sounds exhausting.

To keep up the facade that everything is going to be okay. To keep on going, to keep on smiling, to always look on the bright side of life. It is exhausting. Here's what I have learned this year. Okay? It's a great question to think about at the end of the year. What has the Lord taught us about ourselves, about him?

I remember listening. I used to love listening to Sting when I was younger. Okay? Love Sting. Sting had this song, and he wrote it when he was taking shelter from a tropical storm whilst on the Caribbean.

Right? And the chorus goes like this. Spotify it when you get home. On and on the rain will say how fragile we are. How fragile we are. Right? So he's just watching the storm. He's listening to the rain. [ 7 : 22 ] He's listening to it battered down, and he's thinking about the fragility of his own life. On and on the rain will say how fragile we are. How fragile we are. I was walking with a friend on Wednesday morning. Our kids go to the same school in the same class.

He's a Christian. I know him from back in the day. We're just walking, and we're just sharing what's going on in life. And I'm listening to him. He's going through a horrendous time at the minute. Right? And we stop at the end of the road to tell him about what's going on in our lives.

And he said, well, we just pray. And we just stood at the end of the road. People walking past. Felt a bit awkward, but we just went for it. And do you know what we prayed? We just prayed for one another. Lord, help us keep our eyes on you. Like Peter in the storm, help us just keep our eyes on you.

And daily give us the strength to take small steps of faith as we lovingly trust you and walk with you and know your love. Friends, is that you tonight? Just weary. We're all feeling it. And I think that's why this passage has got such wonderful news for us, because it presents us with who our God is. And I want us to come and savor who he is tonight. And particularly as we think upon the child in a manger, to come and to gaze upon a son who was willing. Okay, it's what the video was about. A son who was willing. And I want us to be strengthened by the grace that is found in Jesus Christ. It's what Paul writes to Timothy, doesn't he? Be strengthened by the grace that is in Jesus Christ. Here's something I read recently. I think it was Peter Mead that wrote this. Really helped me get around, get my head around this and awakened a deep love in my soul for this God. Imagine a hypothetical conversation in eternity past between God the Father and God the Son and God the Spirit. God the

Father says, Son, will you go for us? Will you go for us into a dark world that has rejected us? Will you go? And will you go and show them my glory? Will you go and display to them, help them see my radiant beauty and holiness? And will you go live and die the most agonizing and humiliating of sin-bearing deaths to bring our people back home? Son, will you go for us? And the son thunders back and he says, yes, Father. Nothing would delight me more than for a lost world to see your glory, to see how great you are. I long for that and I desire that they may be with us and that they may share in the perfect love that we experience as Father, Son and Spirit. Yes, I will go. I will go. [ 10 : 27 ] Friends, we need to understand that Jesus is no reluctant teenage boy. Right? He's not being dragged out of his bed. Do we have to go? Do I have to go? Do I have to get up?

He's no reluctant teenage boy. He is a willing son who chose to humiliate himself.

I just want us to see really quickly two things from this passage tonight about this son. Firstly, I want us to see the son who is willing to give it all up. Now follow with me if you've got the passage there at verse 6. This is where we maybe dive into this tonight. What does Paul say about the son? Who being in very nature God. Now take in the panorama of the grandeur of that statement. Who being in the very nature God. Right? I always love those moments in the Bond films. Right? You inevitably get it from the bad guy who comes out with the line, Mr. Bond, do you know who I am? Do you know what I can do to you? Right? Since it's Sean Connery year. What was it used to say? Sean Connery. Mr. Bond, do you expect me to talk? No. Do you expect me to talk? No, Mr. Bond. I expect you to die.

[11:49] Right? The bad guy in the Bond films. Do you know who I am? Do you know what I can do to you? Do you know the power in my courts? Paul says, consider Jesus. Right? Very nature God. Right?

Who existed with God and as God in the beginning. The very one through whom the world was made. If ever there was one who could rightly say, do you know who I am? Do you know what I can do?

Surely it was him. And yet, what did he do with that honor? What did he do with that right? He did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. In other words, he didn't insist on his rights. He wasn't there placarding saying, I'm staying here. I want my rights.

But rather he, without relinquishing, and we need to understand this important theologically, without relinquishing one ounce of his deity for one nanosecond. Right? It's important we get that, that yes, at a moment in time, he wasn't able to hold a rattle. But make no mistake that never did he cease for one moment to be the one who was holding the stars and the planets in place.

This son willingly laid aside his rights as God. And feel the downward stairs movement of these verses, right? Down the stairs. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. Down, down, down, down. He took flesh. He took full flesh. God in human likeness.

[13:33] I couldn't get that thought out of my head this week, right? Up at 6.30 every morning with our newborn. And I'm looking at her, right? It's a wonderfully special time getting up with her in the morning, feeding her the bottle, right? So I'm only jokingly describing the newborn stages as all give and no take.

Okay? The fact that a baby is absolutely dependent on you for everything. And she's sitting there looking at me and I'm holding her. And do you know what I'm sensing?

I am sensing her utter vulnerability. Her utter vulnerability. And God the Son went there. God the Son went there. God chose to become vulnerable. He chose to become weak.

He chose to lay it all aside. And of course, at the time when the strength of the Roman Empire was there for all to see, and there was a ruthless Herod on the scene, Jesus the Son became helpless. Right? The words of that modern carol, the guys at Sovereign Grace, but the sovereign of all looked helpless and small as God gave the world his own Son. And who would have dreamed or ever foreseen that we could hold God in our hands?

[14:54] See the Son who was willing to give it all up. And secondly, savour the Son who was willing to lay it all down.

Okay, with that, I was thinking on it this week, with that downward stairs movement, we're down here, okay? You'd semi-expect Paul to go on to talk about the fact that Jesus lived the first century equivalent of the American dream, would you not?

Right? I mean, great story, this one. The boy born in the manger, right? Negotiated and overcame every barrier, started his own global business, floated it on the stock exchange, sold it for a huge profit, and now he's king living in the mansion.

What a story that would be. But the trajectory of the life of the Son from the point of his birth on is not up.

The wonder of this is that it is down. Verse 8, check it out. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself.

[16:06] Now there's the word that describes the life of Jesus Christ. Humility. Some kind of first century David Blaine, right?

Come to impress us with his tricks. He has come to serve. And in so doing, revealed to us the Father, as the one who is called his full image.

Which means if you want to know what this God is like, savour Jesus the Son as you see him in the Gospels. And how low would he go?

By becoming obedient to death. Do you see that? Obedient to death. Now for God to die is unthinkable enough.

But what is scandalous? Even death on a cross. So in the Son's desire to bring glory to his Father, he goes all the way to the cross.

[17:10] Now consider the cross the most awful form of Roman capital punishment. Right? A form that is reserved for the worst of the worst. Here is a warning shot, a case in point to the watching public.

That if you so dare as to set yourself up as a king, defy Caesar, then this is what's going to happen to you. The utter humiliation that the Son was willing to endure.

The shame of it. The horror of it. But friends, see the glory of it. The glory of it. Because it's not only there that Christ claims the victory for his people.

But think on this. It's there that we see the full glory of this God. Of his goodness. Of his mercy. Of his love. As we see it on the cross, the world looks on and says foolishness. But God looks on and says, there is my wisdom.

[18:11] There is who I am. That is the heart of who this God is. The Son willing to humiliate himself. To show us what the Father is like. And bring glory to his name.

Think on it again, right? The most loved parable that Jesus tells. What is it? Do you want to think about it? The most loved parable that Jesus tells. That the world loves. People love. The prodigal son. Surely it's got to be that.

The prodigal son. Right? The story. The son runs off. The son squanders everything. The son returns home cap in hand. Everyone hearing that story in the audience would expect the Father to go all out and discipline his son.

Right? Make him bear the shame. Right? That he brought on himself. That he brought on his family. That he brought on his community in this day. Make him bear the shame.

Go and sit him on the naughty step. Go and him sit on the naughty step and think about what he's done. But who bears the humiliation in the story? It's not the son. The son gets a party.

[19:18] That's why the older brother's raging. The son gets a party. Who takes the humiliation? It's the father. Surely it's got to be the father in that story.

He bears the humiliation that his son deserves. Not only does he not punish his son, but what does he do? He runs to meet his son. No self-respecting Jewish father in this day would do that.

That is an utter disgraceful thing to do. No father ran. But this father is different. This father is willing to take the shame that his son deserves upon himself.

Bear that shame upon himself. So that his son can know life. And surely the whole point of the parable is that Jesus is teaching his audience.

that this is what God the father is like. And this is why I am here. Friends, because of the son's willingness to do all that, verse 9, the father delights to honor the son to the highest place.

[20:28] That my boy was willing to do that. My son was willing to do all of that. And surely that's what the resurrection and ascension of Jesus is. God vindicating. God glorifying his son.

That's my king. That's my son. And I place him high above every name. And I give him the name. And what a wonderful thought. That every knee will one day bow to this Jesus.

And this is where he is. And just really quickly, two things I want you to be encouraged by tonight. Firstly, as you consider, be encouraged where the son is.

This Jesus, where is he? That he is the one at the right hand of the father, ruling and reigning all things. And if you trust us in him tonight, I want you to know that whatever comes over the next season of life, that this God, this father, he will always be father to you.

Always be a father to you. Friends, in the words of John Owen, the greatest sorrow and burden that you can lay on the father, the greatest unkindness that you can do to him, is not to believe that he loves you.

[21:43] This is the father. And take heart tonight. You consider where the son is. Take heart as you consider who the son is. That he is at the right hand of the father as a man.

He is there as your brother. He is there as your great high priest. And he's still there with a heart of sacrifice. He's still serving. Intent on ever loving his people.

Interceding for his people at God's right hand. Friends, we fall and linger. He is there praying. We stumble and cry. He is there praying.

Why? To the glory of God the father. Right? All of this is for the father's glory. All of this is for him. Friends, and when we bow the knee to Jesus, when we submit our lives to him, as his spirit resides in our hearts, and as we are transformed more into the likeness of this Jesus, here's what goes on. As we live our lives in the son, right, we come to feel the same way about the father as the son does. I love the father. I love him. I'm being found in the son.

[ 22 : 57 ] We come to know the love that the father has for his son. I love my son. There is my boy. Right? Which means to be a Christian is so much more than just to believe certain things and behaving certain ways.

To be a Christian is to be caught up in the very life of the triune gods. And it's to be caught up in something truly wonderful and mind-blowing. And so it's little wonder, almost as we work towards a close, that these verses, verses 5 to 11, it's thought that they were a hymn in the early church, right?

Perhaps Paul's quoting an early Christian hymn. And when you consider the contents of this, friends, it is little wonder that such mesmerizing theology led to such awe-filled poetry.

Of course, in the context, and Pete alluded to it earlier, Paul's encouraging these believers in Philippi, verse 5, to strive for the same mind. Right?

In your lives together, think like this. It's almost like he takes them by the ear and he drags them to the foot of the cross. And in all their stuff that's going on behind the scenes, and you read that later in the letter, these people who aren't quite seeing eye to eye, Paul drags them to the cross and says, when you consider Jesus, how can you be anything other than grateful and kind?

[ 24 : 28 ] How can you be proud when you look at the Son and what he was willing to give up for you? And this is the rocket fuel that is going to allow them to stand firm in their city of Philippi, to declare in a world that says, Caesar is Lord, to declare, know that Jesus is Lord, here's the rocket fuel, right?

As they stand firm and as they hold out the gospel to the world in their city of Philippi. And just as we close, I once heard a story told by a pastor in America called Brian Chappell, right?

And he tells a story about two younger brothers who lived in his hometown. And these two younger brothers were out playing on the sandbanks of the local river one day.

And all of a sudden, the sandbank that they're playing on it, it gives way and they find themselves in a struggle, an all-out fight for survival in quicksand. So that evening when the boys didn't return home, the family sent out search and rescue to try and find the missing boys.

Neighbourhood gets involved and eventually they find one of the brothers unconscious, his head just above the sand. And having managed to wake him and made sure he was alright, they pleaded with him, Can you remember where your brother is?

[ 25 : 50 ] Have you seen your brother? And the boy replied, Yes, I know where he is. And he said, Well, where is he? Help us. We'll run and fetch him. Where is he? And the brother simply said, He's down there because in the struggle, he let me stand on his shoulders.

Friends, that is a wonderful story of sacrifice. But I want us to understand that we have gazed tonight upon the ultimate story of sacrifice.

As we thought about a willing son who made himself nothing, nothing, and who went from crib to cross so that we, as it were, could stand on his shoulders and live.

You know, I've never met a person who would choose to be humiliated. Why would you choose that? Why to be exposed? Why to be mocked? Who would choose that?

And yet, the stunning truth of this passage, the stunning truth of the baby in the manger, is here is a son who willingly chose to humiliate himself and make himself nothing and who did it so that we might look, believe, and live.

[ 27 : 16 ] Let me pray. Lord, Heavenly Father, we just marvel, Lord, that you loved us first.

And Lord, I pray for us here tonight, Lord, we're so conscious of the times in which we live. We're so conscious of the news that we've just been given. And Father, I pray for every single one of our hearts tonight, every single weary soul, every single doubting mind, every single worried heart, Father, that the news of what you have done in sending your son, Jesus, who was willing to come to rescue us and bring us home, Father, would that truth, would it stir our affections for you tonight, our Heavenly Father.

We just praise you, Lord, for the God that you are. Who would come up with a God like this? And yet here, as we have your word in our hands, we can look and we can savour and we can rejoice as your children tonight.

So, Father, be with us now as we turn to remember Jesus Christ as we spend time in communion now. Lord, be with us, we pray. Be working amongst us by your Spirit, we ask.

In Jesus' precious name, Amen.