

**Text: Philippians 2:1-11**

**Title: “He Gave So We Could Gain”**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Open your Bibles to Philippians 2:1-11. This is the Word of the Lord. Let’s stand together as I read. You can follow along in your copy of the Scriptures or in the Pew Bible, pg.1162. Read text and pray.

Now here we have one of the great Christmas texts in the entire Bible. If you want to summarize it in a single sentence, it is that Christ gave up His place in heaven so we could gain a place in heaven. That is the glorious message of the Incarnation and of Christmas. Look again at this powerful explanation of the Gospel and what God did for us in Christ. It’s right in the heart of our text:

**Philippians 2:6 – (Christ), being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,**

**Philippians 2:7 - but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.**

This is what was happening in Bethlehem’s manger. What you see at first appearance is baby Jesus being born to Mary and Joseph. There were the shepherds and the angels and the animals all around. But what in reality was happening was Christ, who existed before He was born into this world, who was and is eternally equal with God, and who enjoyed the place of divinity in the glories of heaven was sent on a mission by the Father to go to the earth. So there was a moment in eternity when God the Father and God the Son had a discussion. The Father said, “Son, I have a mission for you. The humans I have created have sinned. The only way they can be redeemed and forgiven is for a perfect sacrifice to die in their place for the sins they have committed. So, Son, you must give up your place here in heaven for a while so you can go to take on a human body and in that human body to live a sinless life and to die as a perfect sacrifice that atones for human sin.

The Bible says that when asked to make that decision, to give up His place, He did not regard equality with God something to be selfishly grasped.

**Philippians 2:8 - And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!**

So this letting go of his place and position in heaven, this making Himself nothing, this taking the nature of servant, this humbling of himself to die in our place ... this was all the point of Jesus being made in human likeness.

Of course, it goes on to say that God honored Christ by exalting him to the highest place and giving Him a name before which every knee will bow and about which every tongue would confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. The Father gave back to Christ his place in heaven, and much more.

God always does it this way. Those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Think of Jesus: He could have said, "I'm happy here in heaven. I've been here forever and I don't want to change." If anyone could have legitimately thought, "The universe revolves around me," it was Jesus. But aren't you glad Jesus didn't let that attitude rule His life?

The Christmas message of Christ giving up heaven so we could gain heaven is the heart of the Gospel. And believing the Gospel is supposed to change the way we think and the way we act. We cannot simply say, "O yeah, Jesus was born of a virgin in a manger in Bethlehem. He died for our sins. I believe that." If the truths of the Incarnation and the Gospel don't change our thinking and our acting, we really don't believe it, no matter what we claim.

Now specifically Paul had in mind an application for the church in Philippi. It was about church unity. The letter Paul writes to the church in Philippi does not contain the word "sin." This was a great and generous church. But no church is perfect. And an occasion had arisen that brought to light the need for them to work on their unity as a church.

So you can understand what's behind Paul's admonition in...

**Philippians 2:1 - If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,**

**Philippians 2:2 - then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.**

Now let me just pause here and say that this like-mindedness (v.2), this oneness in love, spirit and purpose doesn't come *naturally* to us. You would never expect people to *naturally* act this way. In fact, the opposite of that comes *naturally* to us in our sinful, selfish flesh. This like-mindedness, this unity of love, spirit and purpose comes *supernaturally*. These corporate virtues come from the spiritual realities mentioned in v.1 ... being united with Christ, being comforted by His love at work in our lives, having fellowship with the Holy Spirit, and the tenderness and compassion that we experience in that relationship with Christ and His Spirit. When those spiritual realities are at work in us, it is possible to be like-minded and united in love, spirit and purpose.

Paul goes on the flesh this out:

**Philippians 2:3 - Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.**

**Philippians 2:4 - Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

So we are commanded to let none of our actions and reactions be governed by our wants, our needs and our way. No selfishness, no pride; just humility and consideration for the needs of others.

Again, all these qualities are rooted in the example of Christ.

- “Do nothing out of selfish ambition” – If Christ had been selfishly ambitious He would not have turned loose of His place of supremacy in heaven.
- “Do nothing out of vain conceit” – If Christ had been prideful and self-centered, He would have never left the place of prominence in the universe to come to earth.
- “In humility consider others better than yourselves” – It was the virtue of humility in Christ’s attitude that enabled Him to lay all his privilege aside and to become a servant.
- “Look to the interests of others” – Christ had the mindset that the interests and the needs of others would govern His attitude and actions, not His own interests.

So how do you deal with disharmony, with disunity, with the tendency to be selfish? Paul tells us in v.5:

**Philippians 2:5 - Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:**

Paul would go on to tell them to work out their salvation in fear and trembling because God is working in them both to will and act according to His good purposes (2:12-13). And exactly how do we work out and act out our salvation? He tells them in ...

**Philippians 2:14-15 - Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God...**

In every circle of relationships you and I have there is application for this. Stop to think about how our families would be different if this attitude of Jesus pervaded every person in the home. What if you, husband, decided that you would...

**Philippians 2:3-4 - Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves ... (and) look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

Wife, what if you decided that you would...

**Philippians 2:3-4 - Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves ... (and) look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

Kids, what if you decided that you would...

**Philippians 2:3-4 - Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves ... (and) look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

And church what if we decided in our relationship as fellow believers that we would...

**Philippians 2:3-4 - Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves ... (and) look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

I'm teaching us this today because the change that we are asking our church to embrace today will be one of the most challenging changes we have undertaken as a church. But I believe it will position us to be a stronger church in the years to come.

**A WORD TO GUESTS** – What I'm talking about this morning will hopefully show you a church that is committed to letting the attitude of Christ guide us in the way we go about our life as the people of God. We are not a perfect church, nor is any other church. We're all sinful human beings, and because of that we sometimes don't see eye to eye on things. But we work very hard to let the Spirit of Jesus Christ guide us to be more loving and considerate and compassionate. Guests, I just want you to know that's the kind of church you have come to visit today.

Now we've have had a tremendous response to being in one service during these days of revival. There has been an evidence of God's Spirit moving among us. Response at the invitation time has been strong. We have baptized 25 people since the beginning of Greater Things on Sept.11, 2011. Many more are awaiting baptism. That's the kind of thing we can expect to happen when revival is happening. I have received scores of letters, emails and personal comments from people who have experienced a fresh touch of God in their lives. Revival is beginning, and we must not stop praying for God to continue what He has begun.

Now we have been in one worship service for this revival time, and we are now faced with the decision of what should be the schedule and format for our worship services going forward. When we began the 9-week revival focus, I honestly had no agenda other than for our church to be together to seek the Lord for revival. I wanted to see how what happened during those weeks that might affect our worship schedule and format for the future. And to have changed our worship schedule in November would have been confusing because of the holidays. So we've stayed in this schedule through the end of the year.

We have had sufficient input during this time to know that some prefer more contemporary music; others like more traditional. Some prefer coming early, others prefer coming later. Some really want us to stay in one worship service permanently.

John Lee and I knew this was going to be a very important decision. So about six weeks ago we recruited the Worship Advisory Team. The 11 individuals on this team have an excellent knowledge of the worship preferences in their respective generations and their social circles, but more importantly, they know how to let God lead them. As you can imagine, this group of godly men and women has been a great source of counsel as we are seeking the will of God.

This team has spent hours prayerfully discussing the various options available to us. Personally I have fasted and earnestly prayed for God's wisdom in this matter.

I am grateful for the strong support of our deacons. They are wise leaders in our church who have a great interest in the well-being of everyone in our church.

We have sought to accomplish the following objectives:

- To provide the entire church with opportunities on the Lord's Day to express corporate worship in a scripturally sound and culturally appropriate manner
- To best position our church for the future to reach non-believers and non-attenders for the Lord Jesus Christ

Note: The schedule we are presenting today is not a perfect schedule, nor does it meet everyone's needs exactly, but we feel it is the best possible way to accomplish the objectives I have just mentioned.

While there were many advantages to being together in one worship service during our days of seeking God for revival, we feel it would be best to return to a dual-worship service schedule and format. These two services will be different from anything we have ever done before. Effective Sunday, January 8, the schedule will be as follows:

8:30-9:30am –Traditional Worship  
 9:45-10:45 – Sunday Morning Bible Study (Sunday School)  
 11:00-12 noon –Contemporary Worship

What will these two services have in common? They will both be led by John Lee and me. They will both include the essential elements of prayer, public reading of Scripture, offerings, heart-felt singing and strong biblical preaching, as well as the regular observance of the baptism and the Lord's Supper. For special occasions we will join together in one service just to remember that we are one church with two worship services.

How will the services be different?

Let's talk first about the traditional service. It will not be the "blended" approach that we have had at 11:00 for the past several years. We have discovered that it is not possible to adequately blend the styles of worship in a way that is satisfactory to all. So this service will include some of the more classic traditional worship features:

- Prayer and scripture reading
- Timeless hymns and songs (using hymnbooks if preferred)
- Organ, piano and other orchestral instrumentation
- Choral anthems and other songs performed by soloists or ensembles
- Biblical preaching by the Pastor

Note: Many unchurched people in Fort Worth will be responsive to a worship service like this. We feel like our church can provide the very best in the more traditional elements of worship along with sound biblical preaching.

What about the contemporary service? It will be similar to the style and format of our current 10:30 service, though moving a bit more contemporary (since we will have the traditional alternative). The contemporary service will include:

- Prayer and scripture reading
- Contemporary songs, including contemporary arrangements of hymns

- Band and orchestra
- Singers, as well as a contemporary choir
- Biblical preaching by the Pastor

Note: For our church to have the potential of reaching younger generations like the thousands that we find just down the road at TCU, we must provide a later contemporary worship option. While some young people and young families want to get up early and come to church and be finished early, most non-believers and unchurched are not that way.

You may want to try out both services before you decide where you will settle long-term.

Again, this isn't a perfect plan, but we feel like it is an equitable way to address our present needs, but also to position our church to reach future generations. Change is always difficult, but if we are to be strong in our ministry in this city for the future we'll face critical decisions like this from time to time.

I know we need to talk about this with each other. It's the way that we process it. I beg you to talk to God about it first. Spend time praying so that you know to the best of your ability your attitude is that of Jesus Christ. And when that attitude prevails, our conversations and actions will always be loving and gracious and understanding and merciful.

I know you join me in praying and believing that these trials will be used by God to make us a stronger church for the glory of our precious Savior.

## **CONCLUSION**

It's no coincidence that we come to this decision in a time when we've been asking God for revival. The process of making this decision has been a testing time for our church; God has used it to strengthen our faith.

It's no coincidence that we have come to this decision at the time of the year that we are thinking about the coming of Christ into this world, and the attitude of Christ when He gave up His place in heaven so we could gain a place there. The example of Christ gives us light to guide us through this.

Every sacrifice we make as individuals or as a church for the sake of presenting Christ ... every inconvenience we endure for the sake of the mission of presenting Christ to a lost world is rooted in the example of Christ. He didn't regard His place in heaven, His comfort in heaven, His glory in heaven as something to be selfishly clutched. Instead He relinquished His place and His position so the world could be saved.

Talk about a change! Just think of the change the Father was asking Jesus to make. "Son I want you to change your whole orientation. I want you to change your address. I want you to change your position. I want you to change your existence. I want you to move from the front seat to the back seat."

Imagine what would have happened if Jesus were to say, “I’m not going to make that change. I like my place too much. I’ve been here for eternity; I kind of like it this way.” Where would we be today if Jesus had said to the Father, “I’m not going to make that change.”

A transformational church is one that if for some reason our church were suddenly removed from this city ... and if for some reason the members and the ministries of this church would just disappear, the people of this city would say, “I miss them. Their love helped me know God’s love. Their love put food in my stomach. Their love helped me get through a tough time in my life. Their love taught me God’s Word. Because they *gave* of themselves, I have *gained* a relationship with God.”

And that’s so much like Jesus, who gave up His place in heaven, so we could gain a place in heaven.