Partakers of Grace in Unity

sermonaudio.com

Partakers of Grace
By Steve Viars

Bible Text: Philippians 2:1-11
Preached On: Sunday, September 13, 2015

Faith Church
5526 State Road 26 E
Lafayette, IN 47905

Website: http://www.faithlafayette.org/church
Online Sermons: http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette

Several weeks ago we announced eight new initiatives that we're hoping to accomplish together over the remaining 3 ½ years of our current five year strategic ministry plan and our rationale was that we recognized we have reached a rather pivotal point in the history of our church for several reasons. One of them Pastor Trey mentioned just a moment ago, we are completing, by God's grace, our senior living community. That was one of our keystone projects from our five year plan. We thought it was important for us as a church family to make a statement about the value that we place on serving and loving those who are older. I too want to join him in encouraging you to be with us tonight for church family night at 5 o'clock. You don't have to be a member of our church to participate, just come on and we're going to enjoy various aspects of our body life here in our auditorium just like we always do. Then we're going to go over to our community center and then we're going to encourage you to go right on out the other end of the community center on the east doors and walk down through the senior living community. Some of our seniors will actually have their homes open so you can see what they're like and then you can go down to the clubhouse and see that beautiful facility as well. Of course, there will be cookies along the journey just to provide strength and nourishment for us, but it will be an opportunity for us to celebrate the Lord's goodness. We need to do that, huh? I hope we never take it for granted and just allowing us to accomplish an important ministry objective together in a delightfully unified fashion. So because that's done, we felt like we needed to articulate what we're going to do next.

Another aspect of our rationale of getting after these next eight initiatives is what's occurring in our culture on a number of fronts. We've seen that in the ongoing saga of the county clerk in Kentucky, Kim Davis, and sure there are different ways of thinking about that situation biblically but it illustrates the point that I've made on several occasions that our culture is changing rapidly and in significant ways. So what does that mean for men and women who believe God's word and find our joy and delight in living and proclaiming the Gospel? And I wonder if some who are followers of Jesus Christ in other places feel like it's time to just kind of hunker down? Well, we've decided that if anything this day and age in which we live provides marvelous opportunities for ministry for Christ so essentially we're hitting the gas, not hitting the brakes.

That defines where we are at this point in our history and I'm happy to tell you that we've already made some rather solid progress on the eight initiatives that I talked to you about a couple of weeks ago. I'm very, very glad for the level of excitement and enthusiasm that exists just to get after it. That's what I like, people who, "Let's get after it." So, for example, for our men's ministry at Bethany Farms, we've already begun interviewing candidates for that position and we're hoping to have somebody in place in the next 60 days. We've also received a very generous gift of $100,000 to help with that launch so, praise the Lord, that it's not going to be long until the Gospel is proclaimed right there on that property that was so generously given to this church about nine years ago.

Then there's the neighborhood resource center and the seminary housing at the old Cooler Keg property, this beautiful property that you are in the process of purchasing for a buck. We're doing our due diligence right now. We don't want to take possession of the building and the property so we're having an environmental assessment done. We also did some title work on that and that's all come back clean. We've engage an architect to design the facility. We've met with officials from both the city and the county to address the zoning issues. We had a neighborhood input night this week. So we're moving on that project in a big way as well. In fact, we're going to be taking a special Christmas offering just to make a statement about what we believe about loving those in the urban area of our town. So we're excited about that.

Then there is, thirdly, the issue of expanding our Purdue International Student ministry. We want to launch that. We want to fund that. We want to get that going. Well, I'm happy to tell you that Aaron and T. Burke have decided to answer that call. Aaron is going to be graduating from Faith Bible Seminary next May, Lord willing, and the working plan is for them to be sent by Aaron's home church back in California as a missionary to the Purdue campus, especially for international students. That idea has merit for dozens of reasons and to think about us being in a position to be able to reach and disciple international students at an entirely different level with a couple the high calibre of Aaron and T. is just an incredible gift from God. And for those of you who know that back story on that, T.'s father, Kevitt Brown, a delightful and faithful member of this church for many, many years, one of our deacons, led in international student ministry at Purdue, passed away of cancer not too long ago and to think about God now leading his daughter and son-in-law to serve in international student ministry at Purdue, God is alive. Don't be intimidated by the world. Jesus is building his church with this attendant promise, "The gates of hell will not prevail against it."

Then there's this issue of developing a new ministry to victims of human trafficking so to get that facility constructed and have the program funded. A committee right now is continuing to work on the programming aspect of that ministry along with a number of interested people in our community, working in collaboration with our prosecutor here in our county. We're in the process right now of creating a new legal entity for that ministry. We're looking at the property that was so generously given to us, 90 additional acres on our Faith East campus for what is the logical location of that facility. Think of it, to minister to victims of human trafficking. I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that a special gift of $30,000 has already been given. We're probably a couple of years away from this

actually coming online. There is a lot of work but a tremendous foundation has been laid and already dozens and dozens of men and women are stepping forward saying, "I want to serve in that ministry." If there are people right here in our community or in this location who would be victims of that kind of abuse of treatment who are rescued, we want to be part of making that happen from the foundation of the compassion of Christ.

Then the fifth initiative that I talked with you about is having our Albania partnership determined and funded. The most important issue by far is having the right family. Having the right family. That's why we're excited that another one of next year's seminary graduates, Matt H. and his wife Dana, responded to this opportunity. Isn't that a marvelous picture of them? So we're working in all the planning that goes with an international partnership and we're going to talk to you about how you can participate in all of that if you would like to in the days ahead. But the theme here, you say, "What is all this telling me?" We're off to the races. That's what all of this is telling you.

Then there's our desire to have a downtown church planting team identified and funded and functioning. That's another reason why it's so great to have a church based seminary because it gives such a marvelous pool of candidates for positions like that. We've already started interviewing those who would lead in that new downtown church plant. We hope to have that team in place within the next 60 days and we're very, very glad with what's happening with our community development corporation. We're essentially marshaling suburban resources to meet urban need in collaboration with our city and with others. What a great opportunity and we think we're going to be able to, in the coming days, ramp that up in a significant way with the downtown church plant.

Then seventh is relocating and improving our counseling center and our church based seminary and our staff offices here. We're seriously considering moving all of those activities downtown. Now, no final decision has been made but we know those ministries need to be expanded and the question for now and for the future is where is the best and most effective place to do that? I want to encourage you to be praying for that and yet when the time comes, there is going to be a price tag associated with it. Right now we just need prayer.

Right now we need wise planning and it's happening behind the scenes at a fairly significant rate which takes us to the eighth initiative that we're working on and that is back-filling the current staff offices and counseling center and seminary for our elementary grades for our school, for the children's ministry for our church. We know we need to do that for a lot of reasons but one of the big ones is safety concerns. We would like to have more of a locked down facility during the week at Faith East for our school. That too is going to have a price tag but a lot of work is being done on that behind the scenes.

So you look at that, it's kind of the middle of all of this, then you look at all of just the garden variety outreach and discipleship work that gets done day in and day out by our church family and then, although I don't want to scare anybody, but we're also doing some work on when those eight initiatives are done, what's next, because it's amazing

how much time and effort has to go into some of those keystone projects so we're working on a fair amount of that as well. Now, you might say, in fact, I hope you would say, "Wow! Wow, by God's grace we're getting after it." That's exactly right. By God's grace we're getting after it and that's what happens, friends, when we're partakers of grace in unity. Please let that just kind of roll around your mind for a minute. What happens when a church family chooses to be partakers of grace but in unity?

With that in mind, open your Bible, if you would, to Philippians 2. That's on page 154 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

If you've been with us the last several weeks, you know that the book of Philippians is in part a thank you letter on the part of the Apostle Paul who is currently in prison, probably in Rome, to this dear church in Philippi that has been supporting him as their missionary even during his imprisonment and since they had just sent yet another gift carried by their faithful member, Epaphroditus, Paul wants to express his appreciation along with an explanation for why he is sending Epaphroditus back to them because they assumed he would stay and minister to Paul. But as the introduction to the book of Philippians and Crossway's ESV Study Bible explains, listen to this about context. "Yet Paul's purpose in writing goes even further. He is above all concerned that the Philippians continue to make progress in their faith. While they are no doubt conflicts within the congregation, not only that of Euodia and Syntyche, the Philippians appear to be a healthy congregation in contrast to the troubled groups in Corinth and in Galatia." Now listen, "Can they then relax and rest? Paul's answer is an emphatic, 'No!' The world is too perilous and the Gospel too glorious for them to be content with past achievements. They must follow Paul's example and press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." That is a great statement, friends, that summarizes much of what we would say about where we are. The world is too perilous and the Gospel is too glorious for us to be content with past achievements. True that? Absolutely.

Well, in order for them to continue to advance, there had to be unity and in order for us to continue to accomplish what God has for us here there has to be unity and that doesn't come automatically in any relationship, right? That doesn't come automatically under your roof at home. It doesn't come automatically in your office. It doesn't come automatically at church. Did you know that? It doesn't come automatically, but thankfully God's word has plenty of answers and direction to help us if we'll take it. Do you want to take it? Absolutely.

Philippians 2, beginning in verse 1, "1 Therefore," note that, "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness," that will destroy unity, "or empty conceit," that will destroy unity, "but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." Now here's the foundation of it, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to

be grasped, but emptied Himself," here's how you get to a position of unity, "but he emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Well, what happened? "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Don't you love the word? I hope you love that particular passage of Scripture. We're talking this morning about being partakers of grace in unity and these verses that we just read give us three actions because you have to work at it. It doesn't come naturally, huh? It doesn't come naturally anywhere. Three actions of people who wish to live and serve in harmony with one another.

It starts by being unified by reflecting on all you have in common. That's the emphasis of these first four verses and think about the first word in the text, "therefore." Well, when the Apostle Paul or any Bible writer humanly speaking wrote or dictated what we now have as Scripture, you understand it did not originally have a chapter division. It didn't initially have a verse division. Now, we're all glad for them, are we not? Can you imagine if I stood up here and said something like, "Now please find your place in the Gospel of Matthew that contains the Sermon on the Mount." No chapter, no verse. Just find that. Or, "Please look in Isaiah's prophecy to his great vision of the holiness of God." No chapter, no verse, just find that. We'd be looking a long time, huh? Be looking a long time. We kind of prefer, "Please turn to Matthew 5 or please turn to Isaiah 6," so we like chapter and verse divisions, don't we? In fact, we even like page numbers but we understand that that was all added later and, regrettably, because sometimes Paul has long sentences, regrettably that can disconnect us from the flow of thought and we need to keep in mind what is Paul's overall context so that we can properly apply it to where we're living today. That's why it's so important to note that the very first word in chapter 2, verse 1, in fact, I bet you noticed it when I was reading because when we read the word, your attention level goes way up, right? Please tell me you think that way about the word of God.

So when I read the word "therefore" you immediately thought context, thinking about, "Well, what has the previous chapter been about?" It's about Paul's challenges of being imprisoned and also the presence of so-called Christians trying to undermine and discredit him with their gossip while he was in jail for his faith. We've also in chapter 1 seen this emphasis on the Gospel and how much Paul appreciates the Philippians because they've been faithful partakers of grace and they've been participants of the Gospel right along with him. So when you hear the "therefore" in chapter 2, you've got all of that in the back of your mind: Paul is in prison; Paul has people discrediting him and trying to undermine him but there's this emphasis on the joy of the Gospel.

Then we saw some great verses like chapter 1, verse 21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" You've got to crank that into the "therefore" of chapter 2, verse 1. Or

Philippians 1:27, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ," that's what we studied last week, "so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." So Paul is already introducing this theme of unity that he goes on and develops in the passage that we just read.

Well, hopefully we would all say this, "Unity is a hard thing." I mean, I hope when I read those verses, I hope when you were kind of getting a taste of that the previous couple of weeks in chapter 1 you said, "Hey, that is a hard thing, whether it be in the home, whether it be in the neighborhood, whether it be with our extended family, whether it be at the workplace, whether it be at church." In fact, if we were honest, which you kind of ought to be when you come into the Lord's house, you could probably describe a situation right now in which you find yourself at odds with someone. Yeah? Well, what Paul says first is: you are unified by reflecting at least with other followers of Christ, on all that you have in common. That's the point.

So in verse 1 he says: consider what we share in Christ. "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion." Now, I realize that the structure of that sentence might throw us because you might say, "Well, is Paul suggesting maybe there's not?" No, that's not the point. The verse was originally written in Greek and this particular construction Paul uses would typically be translated by us in English with the word "since." So since among Christians there is encouragement in Christ. Since among Christians there is consolation of love. Since there is fellowship of the Spirit. Since there is affection and compassion.

Remember the way chapter 1 ended: they were all suffering for Christ. It's possible that verse 30 is suggesting that some of them were actually imprisoned in Philippi for the Gospel just like Paul was simultaneously imprisoned in Rome for the Gospel and they all knew how much encouragement they had enjoyed in Christ together and they all knew how much they had had fellowship in the Spirit together and the point is: wouldn't it be a terrible thing if a relatively minor issue in the church divided them up as if they did not share any common ground. That's a very important relationship principle, the difference between centered thinking and fringe thinking. Here's what some people do: they look at another person and they immediately divide up on the basis of their differences. They just immediately start talking about, "Now, how are we different and how can we fight about it?" It's amazing how quickly they can make enemies. It's amazing how quickly they can find some reason. That's what fringe thinking is. "Let's start with all the ways we differ."

Very unwise. Very unwise. This text is calling us to centered thinking. In other words, let's come to the center at the beginning and let's discuss all the things we have in common. Let's join arms at all the ways we possibly can. Let's find as much common ground as possible and then together as friends on the basis of our common ground, we'll move out and discuss whatever differences might exist among us. This can even happen in the home where a so-called Christian husband and wife are at each other's throats as if everything about their relationship is defined by this particular disagreement whereas

others can handle that disagreement in a Christ-centered, in a solution-oriented fashion, a grace-filled fashion. Why? Because they always have what they hold in common as the foundation on which they address their disagreements. That's wisdom. That's unity.

That's certainly true when it comes to functioning in the church. In a place that moves as rapidly as we try to, there's always going to be some things that are not your first choice. Do you realize that? There is always going to be a few things that rub you the wrong way but some people get their nose out of joint over relatively minor issues as if there has been no or is no encouragement in Christ. They get their nose out of joint so rapidly as if there was never any consolation of love. As if there wasn't any fellowship in the Spirit. As if there wasn't any affection and compassion. That's fringe thinking instead of centered thinking.

Now, add the argument of verse 2. You could say it like this, I suppose: learn to play spiritual same-same. Now, if you have kids in your house, you probably know what that means. Do you know what the same-same game is? There are different versions of it but basically it has little cards generally with pictures on them and you turn them all over and then you try to remember where the matches are, right? And any time you get a cow and another cow you say, "Same-same." You've played that, right? I'm a simple man. And the game, the point is the person at the end of the game who has the most same-sames wins. Well, that's what Paul is saying here, "make my joy complete by being of the," there's one, same-same, "same mind, maintaining the," same-same, "same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."

Do you know that the average evangelical church in the United States has less than 100 people in it? Do you know why that's often true? Because you can't get more than 100 people together under the same roof and have them get along together very long. That's right and what I'm saying is: playing same-same spiritually is an art. It is. It requires mental discipline and sometimes people aren't particularly interested in or skilled at playing. For example, I kind of tweaked you earlier on purpose so that I could now say this: I mentioned that Kim Davis issue; the clerk in Kentucky refusing to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. And what I said to you was: there were different ways of thinking about that biblically. Well, that might have bothered you. That might have bothered you that I said there are different possible ways of thinking about that issue and what's interesting is, there will be people in our services today on either side of that issue. Some saying she is right. Some saying she is wrong. Believing equally that their position is biblical. Well, here's the question: do we really want to divide up over the clerk in Rowan County, Kentucky as if we share no common ground that is much more important than that one particular difference? Find some same-sames.

Now here's a question because sometimes even God's people develop this, "It's my way or the highway," thing so, "You either agree with me on the Kim Davis issue or I'm gone," and that's about the way they usually say it even to a sweet person like me. Well, here's a question: could that "my way or the highway" mentality ever just be an expression of pride? Could it? That's why Paul says, "Let the Gospel humble you. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but," here it is, "with humility of mind regard

one another as more important than yourselves." Now look, that doesn't mean we can't hold convictions, okay? It doesn't mean that but I'm asking this morning would Christ be better served if we would hold some of these issues that are not clearly outlined in Scripture with a modicum of humility.

Do you really think that when you get to heaven Jesus is going to let out a sigh of relief and say, "Finally, the only person who had it all right. I'm so glad you're finally here. Now let's go and straighten out everybody else together." If you haven't done so, I would encourage you to read and study Steward Scott's book on pride and humility. That's a book that many of us would be well served to read once a year or maybe once a quarter or every morning, you can decide. Stewart said this, "It should be abundantly clear that without humility we cannot be the exemplary Christians God has called us to be. In turn, one can't put on humility if he doesn't first realize areas where he has sinful pride. Pride lies behind every sin and especially behind strife," the polar opposite of unity, "behind strife and contention." Is it possible, friend, that one of the reasons you're often at odds with others if you are is because you lack the humility of mind commanded in this text?

Now, it goes on to say: prioritize the interests of others. "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." You know, we've seen that over and over around here. By the way, if you say, "Well, is Pastor Viars preaching about this because somebody got honked off?" No, Pastor Viars is preaching about this because it's the next issue in the text. I decided last December that this Sunday we were going to be talking about this particular thing. That's one of the reasons I like planning the preaching schedule well in advance and if you say, "My husband and I got into a huge row this week and you are getting us right between the eyes," you're going to have to thank God for that, not me, because I didn't know a thing about your row, in fact, I've been out of town. The only person I've had a row with is that policeman who stopped me on the way home yesterday. But anyway, let's not get into that. Let's not get into that.

So if this is impacting you – he gave me a warning, by the way, because I'm just such a sweety – but anyway, I'm totally off my notes now. My apologies, Austin, my son-in-law who is a policeman. I have shamed the family name yet again. But what I like, I'm not speaking on this because there's any issue, there's not that I'm aware of. What I like is how many people around here get exactly what we're talking about. They just get what we're talking about.

So I may not like that particular song or that particular music style but that's okay. Apparently that one is not for me. Or that particular initiative isn't my strongest interest or passion. But if that's what the church family wants to do next, I'm going to jump in. I'm going to serve. I'm going to give. I'm going to pray. I'm going to rejoice and maybe my particular passion will be the one that is chosen next or the one that is chosen somewhere down the line. But don't look merely out for your own personal interests but also for the interest of others. That's what contributes to unity. Also many of the ministries that we pursue, they don't have immediate blessing or benefit. They just don't so if you're just in it for your interest, you realize you might be setting yourself up for failure. You might be working with a group of people right now who aren't skilled at

saying thank you. You're not going to get much out of it right now. Or who have never been taught to behave. Or whose faithfulness and commitment is very weak. So you're not going to get a lot out of that particular service opportunity right now but who cares. Don't merely look out for your own. "He didn't thank me so I'm wound up." No, don't merely look out for your own personal interests but also for the interest of others. Could I just ask you: would it help you this morning to say to the Lord that you want to work on a relational approach that is more about centered thinking and less about fringe thinking. By learning to discipline your mind to reflect on all that you have in common with those in your life who know the Lord.

Now, let's keep going in the text. Also be unified by developing the mind of Christ. I realize you might say, "This is hard. It's hard to build unified productive relationships with others in my life." It is. It is, but this is where a verse that appears later in the book can really help us, "I can do," how many things? "All things." That's right. Think about your house, it's possible to get unity going on in there. Think about other relationships. "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Paul says you can choose to think the way Christ did. Remember, God never gives us a command that would be impossible to carry out. Do you believe that? You can develop the mind of Christ that helps you live in a way that is consistent with this text. That's what Paul meant to the Ephesians when he instructed them, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." You can change the kind of thinking that is leading to such division. That's what Peter meant when he told his readers, "Prepare your minds for action. Keep sober in spirit. Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

You see, some people believe that success for them depends on the conditions of the circumstances around them right now. "I'll be happy if my spouse does what I want him or her to do. I'll be happy if my boss does certain things. I'll be happy if the weather does certain things or if my health goes a certain direction or my friends do this or that." That is a very defeating way to live. You set yourself up for disappointment because other people and/or circumstances don't always go the way you desire so in that scenario you become the passive victim, "My joy is dependent on what everybody else is doing or not doing." It's a defeating way to live.

It's also an unbiblical way to live. God doesn't portray you as a passive victim. You're an active worshiper. An object of your desire or your worship, your passion, is revealed by the way you choose to think about the events that unfold around you and God wants us to be developing the mind of Christ and that's the only way that unity will ever be achieved. You say, "What was his mind like?" Well, he didn't hold tightly to his position. Think of that. "Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." This verse, by the way, teaches the eternal preexistence of Christ.

One of my theology professors, John Whitcomb, used to like to say, "Jesus' coming to the earth was one of his more recent accomplishments," and that's true. The Apostle John said this, "In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." There is no one else of

whom words like that could ever be spoken and Paul makes it clear he possessed equality with God.

But then he says even though he possessed it, he didn't grab onto it. He didn't consider even that something to be grasped. In order to accomplish the Father's will, that position had to be relinquished and, you see, that may be one of the ways that many followers of Jesus Christ need to change in their minds because there are some things that people are holding onto so tightly that it clouds the way they respond to the people and the events around them. "I have to be respected." Why are you holding onto that so tightly? "I have to win this argument." Why is that so important to you? "I have to have my things." Can I ask you this morning: is it possible that one of the ways God wants you to change is by releasing your grip on something you hold onto too tightly? Maybe you shouldn't consider that something to be grasped and maybe your unwillingness to develop the mind of Christ in this particular way is what results in so much division and divisiveness in your life.

Paul says he emptied himself. It's the Greek word kenoo. That's why we refer to this passage theologically as the kenosis of Christ. It means he voluntarily laid aside the independent use of some of his attributes. Now, we have to be careful there. It's not true that he was exchanging deity for humanity. It's not that he was no longer God. If that were the case, he could not later die for our sin. But what it means is he looked at the glory he possessed in heaven and he was willing to lay that aside. And even though he possessed eternal riches, Paul told the Corinthians, he was willing to become poor. He was even willing to relinquish his favorable relationship with the Father because at least for a period of time on what we now call Good Friday, God the Father turned his back on his own Son while his Son bore the weight and penalty of our sin. He emptied himself even of that which is why he said on the cross, "My God, My God," what? "Why have You forsaken Me?" He emptied himself and, by the way, notice the grammar: he emptied himself. Not somebody else emptied him or someone else made him be. It's very important. That's a reflexive use. He emptied himself. It was voluntary.

He took on the form of a servant. The text goes on to say that he humbled himself. That's the condition of one's mind and that theme runs throughout this passage. He became "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." What would he later say in the garden of Gethsemane? "O My Father, if it's possible let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will but as You will." And what I'm saying is when you get a group of people like that together who are trying to develop the mind of Christ and are trying to humble themselves and are trying to become obedient to God's word and have all sorts of things in their life that they're willing to relinquish if that helps them serve the Lord more, much is going to be accomplished for God in a unified and often a rapid manner. When we move self out of the way, it's amazing how much ministry for Christ gets done.

By the way, I would just pause here and say: has there been a definite time in your life where you've trusted Christ as your Savior? This one who was willing to empty himself and go to the cross for you paying for your sin? We sang earlier about choices. Well, a

choice has to be made, the choice to repent. The choice to admit your need and then place your faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. You can't have the mind of Christ, you can't be developing that over time unless there has been a definite time in your life where you've trusted him. That's why tonight we're going to be celebrating the stories of men and women who have trusted Christ. We're going to be celebrating the fact that the baptismal waters are going to be sloshing because that is proof that Jesus is still drawing men and women to himself. He's still building his church. Don't be intimidated by this culture. He's still building his church and the what? The gates of hell ain't gonna prevail against that and so it's possible for people like us to function in a unified way as we seek to put on the mind of Christ. Can I ask you: what would have to change about the condition of your mind to bring your thought life more in line with the mind of Christ? Are you even in the habit of slowing up and thinking, "Now what am I thinking right now?" And is that really the mind of Christ that needs to be embraced or is it the polar opposite that needs to be discarded?

Lastly, Paul says be unified by focusing on eternity. Because Christ was willing to think this way and live this way, God also has highly exalted him. Do you realize that when you choose to live in a way that is consistent with what's being taught in this passage you're part of God being exalted? That's why I hope when we go out and look at the senior living community later on tonight and, by the way, it's supposed to be beautiful weather. It might even actually be a little chilly. Bring your coat. That will be a place to put some cookies in. But I'll tell you, that was done with excellence. It was done with excellence by people of God and we're going to celebrate that but I think Christ is exalted by people who have sought to develop his mind, in a unified way make a statement about those who are older.

The text says God has given him a name that is above every name. You see, belief in the superiority of Christ unifies us more than anything. Pastor Trey earlier quoted from Acts 4:12, "there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." And we're going to hear a whole lot of stories tonight about individuals who are glorifying the name of Christ and God has given him a name that is above every name.

The passage ends by saying the day will come when every knee will bow to him. You know, think about this, who knows, Jesus could come today, huh? Jesus could come while we're celebrating the senior living. I'm going to grab a cookie on my way out. He could come today, huh? Before the sun goes down? But if God gives us more years to serve him together, think about this, won't it be great to stand together in heaven and hear men and women who were won through the ministry out at Bethany Farms and hear those men proclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father? Won't it be great to see the replacement of the Cooler Keg hot mess? Can't you wait until we hear the first testimony of someone who was won to Christ in that place and proclaiming that Jesus is their Lord to the glory of God the Father? Can't you taste it when one of these international students impacted by Aaron and T. stand up and give their testimony maybe even in broken English that Jesus Christ is their Lord to the glory of God the Father?

I'll tell you right now, it's going to bring tears to our eyes when the first victim of human trafficking stands and says that Jesus is her Lord or his Lord to the glory of God the Father and what somebody else meant for evil and that's about as evil as it gets, God meant it for good.

Think about our friends in Albania, huh? Can't you wait? A predominantly Muslim country. Matt and Dana are going over there to do something about that. Can't you wait until you see a video of a follower of Jesus Christ who has been won as a result of that ministry confessing that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father? The haunting truth is that those who reject him in this life will some day face him not as Savior but as Judge and our goal is in as unified a fashion as we can to function with passion and focus and unity so as many can face him as Savior as possible.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, Lord, thank you for this great text about the kenosis of our Savior and, Lord, we're, if we're honest, willing to acknowledge that far too often we're grasping onto things instead of relinquishing them. Far too often we're thinking thoughts that are divisive instead of unifying. Far too often we run out to the disagreements instead of embracing the commonalities. Lord, there is so much about this text that it's unlike the way we too frequently think and live so, Father, I pray that you would, through your Spirit, let your word cleanse us and if repentance needs to take place, I pray that it would. And Lord, if change needs to occur, I pray that it would. And Father, for all the right examples of unity in our church family and all that you've done as a result, we praise you because we acknowledge that's only because of the saving and sanctifying Savior. We pray this in his name. Amen.