

August 9, 2009
Pentecost 10
Philippians Sermon Series

“The Cure for ‘I Trouble’”

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

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, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There is a terrible disease afflicting our American people. It is not cancer, or heart problems, or obesity, or some dangerous flu epidemic. The disease I am referring to is “I Trouble.” It afflicts people in the highest levels of government and in the largest financial institutions of our country. It afflicts our homes, turning children against their parents and husbands and wives against each other. It led Cain, Adam and Eve’s first born son, to kill his brother Abel. It leads gang members to spray rival gang members with bullets.

There used to be a popular magazine with the simple name of “Life” then came “People,” then “Us” and finally there was the magazine with the brazen two letters, “Me.” Remember the magazine “Others?” It never existed. In the 1960’s we were told: “Know Yourself!” In the 70’s it was “Find Yourself!” In the 80’s it was “Express Yourself!” Then there were the 90’s with the battle cry, “Indulge Yourself!” Today we are struggling to save ourselves from financial ruin.

There is a recent book called “Generation Me” written about the epidemic of narcissism that is sweeping our country. Little children are given trophies for just showing up for soccer practice. They color in books with titles such as “I am special!” They attend princess parties that cost lots of money. Donald Trump brazenly names all his buildings after himself, and Terrell Owens declares at a press conference that he enjoys being called selfish by the media. College students angrily confront a professor for not allowing them to retake a test on which they did poorly because of a hangover. Everyone can be a star through self promotion on You Tube, Face Book, and by texting friends who seriously aren’t all that concerned to hear what you had for breakfast this morning.

It is so easy to see this problem of “I Trouble” in others but so hard to see it personally in ourselves. This morning we want to go the emergency room of God’s Holy Word. Here in

these words from Philippians we have the much needed prescription for curing "I Trouble" and also the much needed power for a cure.

The prescription for curing "I Trouble"

The Apostle Paul offers a prescription for curing "I Trouble" with these words, "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, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." Let me ask you an important personal question. Do you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, any comfort in his love, any fellowship with the Holy Spirit, any tenderness and compassion built up inside of you because of what Jesus has done for you? Sure you do.

This past week in our Star Bible Camp we talked to our children about sin and how far we fall short of God's glory. We talked about Jesus and how he absorbed all our sins the way this sponge might soak up water. We talked about his suffering and death to forgive us and free us so we can have eternal life with him. When you talk to someone about Jesus, or hear about what he has done for you, you have these feelings of deep love, compassion, tenderness, and joy that well up inside of you, and sometimes simply overwhelm you. One little girl in Bible camp volunteered to sing, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." If you have ever been moved or touched by Jesus love for you, then have that same compassion, tenderness, and love for other people. When you open the treasure of God's Word, and see how much he loves you by giving you his Son Jesus, it creates a love and tenderness and compassion for other people.

Paul gives us more in this prescription for curing "I Trouble." He writes,

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition, or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." Pride is our greatest enemy. Humility is our best friend. Pride loves to compare ourselves to other people. Humility compares ourselves to Jesus. Pride covets the success of other people. Humility celebrates the success of other people. Pride is about what I feel, what I desire and what I want. Humility asks what others need and desire and what Jesus wants. Pride is about my glory. Humility is about Jesus' glory and helping others see that glory.

A famous football coach Gene Stallings from Alabama was fond of telling about his greatest moment in sports. He told about a time he attended a Special Olympics sports meet. The gun went off, the runners took off. Half way down the track one of the boys fell down. One by one the other runners stopped running, turned around, and helped the boy who had fallen. They held him up and all together they crossed the finish line.

The prescription continues for "I Trouble" continues: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also the interest of others." How different these words sound from the language of today which speaks of self-absorption, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, and self-pity. When you are steeped in feeling sorrow for yourself, then the problem of "I Trouble" really grabs a hold of you. You erect these horrible high walls around yourself, and you plaster them with pictures of how miserable you are, and you look at these

pictures and then cry in your pillow. You don't want to get up from your bed and look out the window to see the mercies of God which are new to you each morning. You don't want to see other people who are worse off than you are, because maybe God will touch your heart and lead you to see you have tremendous value and worth not just as child of heaven, but a child of this earth who is to shine like stars in the universe. True greatness and worth comes when look on the interest of others. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be first must be a slave of all, even as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many."

There was once a little boy named Chad who was shy and did not make friends easily. After his family moved to a new neighborhood, it was even harder to break the ice and make friends. Valentine's Day was approaching and Chad decided to personally make Valentines for all the kids in his class. His mother bought him the glue and paper and even let him use her good scissors. She made fresh cookies that he could include with each Valentine. When he came home, she wondered if any of the children would remember Chad. As he walked in the door, he said to his Mom- not one Mom, not one, not one Valentine. His mother's heart sank for him, until he finished the sentence, "I did not forget to give one." He found the cure for "I Trouble." To the selfish Christians in Corinth Paul reminded them of Jesus' words, "It is better to give than receive."

The power for the cure of I trouble

We know what needs to be done to be less selfish and more giving in our lives, but where will we find the power to change? That power is found in Jesus and his sacrificial love. Listen again to these words from Paul the prisoner in Rome as he speaks of Jesus love for us. "Who being in the very nature of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." Jesus did not see a need to be equal with his heavenly Father, because from all eternity he already possessed this equality with God as John says, "The word was with God and the word was God." It is hard for our limited human minds to understand and comprehend the majesty and glory that Jesus enjoyed with is Father from all eternity. In John 17 Jesus prayed, "O Father, give me the glory I had with you before the world began." Jesus was willing to leave this glory to come into our world to rescue us. That is the ultimate example of humility and love. In Jesus we have the power to change our lives.

Paul writes, "But he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, and being made in human likeness, And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and become obedient to death-even death on a cross!" Jesus humbled himself or emptied himself of his glory, yet never gave up his position as God. He became the servant. He stooped down to take upon himself the garbage of our sin. Isaiah said, "Surely he took our infirmities and carried our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities..." He was willing to submit himself to death on the cross to make the ransom payment for our sin. Martin Luther wrote in one of his hymns: "The Son obeyed the Father's will, Was born of virgin mother, And, God's good pleasure to fulfill, He came to be my brother. No garb of pomp or pow'r he wore; A servant's form like mine he bore, to lead the devil captive."

In our Bible camp we learned how far we fall short of God's glory because of our sin. We saw a picture of the Grand Canyon to show how impossible it would be to jump across the Grand Canyon. So it is impossible to come back to God because his glory demands that

we be perfect before he can accept us. But then we saw Jesus and his perfect life as he always thought first of other people, and as he gave his life for us on the cross. That is our hope of being accepted by God and our hope of joining Jesus in glory. That is our strength for putting others first in our lives.

After giving his life for us, Jesus was raised again to glory. "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Today, in this life, here and now you already share the glory that Jesus was given by his Father when he rose from dead. It is not a glory that you have on your own, but a glory that you have in Jesus. An even greater glory will be yours when he raises you to life again on the last day. Keep your eyes on Jesus and his glory. That's your cure and my cure for this problem of "I Trouble." Amen.