

A Shared Mind

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Preacher: Jeremy Ng

[0 : 00] So let's pray. Our dear Heavenly Father, help us now to clearly hear from us what you want us to hear.

! Speak through my weakness today, your Holy Word, and grant your Holy Spirit to do the supernatural work that only he can on our hearts. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Now have a look at this on the screen. I'm not sure how clear it is, but tell me, what are you looking at? Don't be shy, yell out your answers. Any guesses?

Anyone? Sorry? Ants, you sure? Okay, well, believe it or not, he's right.

That is a living lifeboat made entirely out of fire ants. Here's another closer up photo so you can see the ants a little better.

[1 : 07] So that whole structure, top to bottom, is made entirely out of hundreds of thousands of fire ants clinging to one another and floating on the surface of the water.

Now these fire ants usually build their nest along river banks, which is normally fine until the waters start rising. And when floods come, they don't drown because they do this incredible thing where they evacuate their nest and cling together to form these living rafts.

None of them complain if they are dinged underwater. At least, I don't think they do. I don't speak fire ant. But in this way, they can safely coast along the water until they reach dry land and restart their nest all over again.

Now, I apologize if that photo made some of your skins crawl, but at least now you are awake and I have your attention. But why did I show you that photo?

Because when danger comes, fire ants don't panic. They don't scatter. They don't do anything selfish. Rather, they cling to one another.

[2 : 21] And their survival depends on working together, clinging together, and being one. And while Paul never mentions fire ants in today's passage, he does call the church to a very same instinct.

To stand side by side, to cling to one another, and to be one. I mean, did you notice how often the theme of oneness shows up in today's passage?

How in chapter 1, verse 27, for example, Paul calls us to one spirit, one faith. In verse 30, the same struggle.

Chapter 2, verse 1, the common sharing and same love, just to name a few. It's all over the passage. But why be one? Because, in verse 27, Paul tells us that whatever happens, we are to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Now, more literally, verse 27 says, only behave as citizens worthy of the gospel. And that's what the ESV footnote tells us.

[3 : 36] So, what's that all about? Well, you can think of your Malaysian citizenship for a moment. When you travel overseas, and you hand over your passport at immigration, you're not just acting as a private individual at that point.

You are representing your country. So, you would have to conduct yourselves in such a manner, so as not to bring shame to Malaysia. You would represent Malaysians well, and its people well.

And in the same way, Paul reminds us that if we belong to Christ, our true home is not Malaysia. It's heaven. We belong to another kingdom, and therefore we carry heaven's passport.

So, we should all live in a manner which represents the gospel of Christ well. And that, friends, Paul will argue, happens when the church stands firm as one.

In Paul's mind, these two things cannot be separated. A church that lives in a way that is worthy of the gospel is a church that stands firm as one.

[4 : 50] A church that lives in a way worthy of the gospel is a church that stands firm together as one. So, if we at BEMKEC want to live such lives, we must care deeply about being one.

And it's important that we understand that the kind of unity Paul is talking about here is not merely the kind of unity you hear about in your banditikan moral and civic classes.

It's not the type of unity you hear about in your company retreats or your multiracial festivals. You know, Ali, Ahok, and Mutu all celebrating their festivals together in peace.

You know, while that's all well and good, that kind of unity only exists to keep the peace. For once the festivities are over, everyone goes their merry way.

However, the unity that Paul is talking about here is far, far deeper. It's the unity of a shared purpose, or as we learned last week, a shared life mantra.

[6 : 03] It's a unity in which all of us can confidently say as citizens of heaven, To live is Christ. Or, as the end of verse 27 puts it, It is a striving together for the faith of the gospel.

Though, here's the thing. Unity is so often hard work. So think back to your last group assignment. How smoothly did that go? You were working with maybe 5 or 10 or 15 people. Now, imagine working not with 5, not with 10, not with 15, but 300 people.

300 people. 300 different opinions. Different personalities. Different voices. Worse yet, 300 different sinners.

Friends, conflict is inevitable. So, here is the dilemma. While unity is essential, it's also exhausting.

[7 : 15] So, how can we possibly cling to one another when things like our selfishness and our suffering are working to pull us apart? Paul's answer today is brilliant.

Shared citizens need shared minds. We need a shared mind. We need to align our thoughts, our attitudes, and our thinkings to stand like-minded for the gospel of Christ.

And today, that's what we'll see. First, we must stand amid suffering. Second, we need to seek the good of others.

And for third, we need to share the mindset of Christ. Now, Paul begins today by showing us that if we truly stand together in one spirit, the Christian life will not be a cakewalk.

It will involve opposition. And it will involve suffering. In verse 30, Paul reminds the Philippians, you know, you're facing the same struggle I faced.

[8 : 26] Remember what you saw when I first came to Philippi? Well, I'm still in that struggle. And now, so are you. So, what did they see?

Let me take you back. Back to Acts chapter 16. Where Paul first arrives in Philippi as a missionary. He casts out a demon from a slave girl.

And all hell breaks loose. The locals don't give him a warm welcome. They incited the crowds. They lied to the Roman authorities about what Paul was doing.

And before you know it, both Paul and Silas are stripped. They are flogged. And they are thrown in prison. And by the way, if you want to know how this story ends, I encourage you to read Acts 16 in your own time.

It's an incredible story. But here's what you need to understand. Philippi is a Roman colony. So, the Philippians are recognized as Roman citizens.

[9 : 30] And that's great. Because Rome was great. And having a Roman passport was a key to progress. It was a key to privilege. It was a key to status.

It meant legal protections, economic opportunity, and social standing. And honestly, which one of us wouldn't want that for ourselves today?

But here's the tension. Living as a heavenly citizen means you cannot fully play by Rome's rules. You couldn't worship Caesar when required.

You couldn't participate in certain trade associations that were tied to pagan worship. You couldn't stay silent when Rome demanded compromise.

And that meant great consequences upon their lives. It meant great loss. Loss of work. Loss of reputation. Loss of security.

[10 : 30] And given where Paul was at the time, prison, possibly even loss of your lives. That's the kind of suffering the Philippian church witnessed firsthand.

And now, that's the kind of suffering they're facing themselves. The resistance to Christianity was making it harder and harder to live out that heavenly citizenship.

And this is what we mean by suffering. It's not suffering for suffering's sake, but suffering for the sake of the gospel because you are a citizen of heaven.

And from the Roman Empire up until today, honestly, not much has changed. There are still places and homes in the world where having gospel citizen on your IC means giving up on living safe and peaceful lives.

It means you're living as an alien here on Earth no matter which country you live in. So, even here in Malaysia, there are some groups of Christians who face loss of work, terrible oppression, and abandonment from their families.

[11 : 45] And that's when we feel the pressure of our heavenly citizenship the most, don't we? When we feel that pressure, we start to grow weary.

We start seeking our own good. We start seeking our own comfort. And when we don't get those things, that's when we start to become a little short with one another.

That's when we start taking it out on our brothers and sisters. So, what's the solution? How can we unite instead of running when suffering comes knocking on the door?

Well, Paul says, it's time to change your mindset on suffering. You see, Paul doesn't see suffering as automatically bad.

In fact, did you notice his surprising take in verse 29? So, you can look at verse 29 with me, where Paul says, it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ to what?

[12 : 54] Not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for him. It has been granted. Or, in other words, it has been gifted.

Now, has Paul completely lost his mind? since when was suffering a gift? And here's the answer. When suffering is filtered through a gospel lens.

For when viewed through the lens of the gospel, suffering is actually a sign of your heavenly citizenship. Now, what do signs do?

They point beyond themselves. And if you look at verse 28, Paul is saying that suffering functions as a sign in two directions. To those who oppose us, it points to their destruction.

But to us, it points to our salvation. Let's break that down with the first one. When people oppose God's children, who are they opposing?

[14 : 06] Really, they are opposing God himself. So, their opposition confirms their unbelief. And it seals their faith. For God will vindicate his people.

God will have the final say. And God will sweep away all his opponents. And at the same time, our suffering for the gospel reassures us.

It shows that you really do belong in the kingdom of God. That you really are citizens of heaven. For if you were not, why would you be suffering for it?

So, as surely as those who reject God's kingdom will face his judgment, those who belong in God's kingdom will receive his salvation. And both of these by God.

Now, yes, it can be tempting to throw in the towel and to give up your heavenly citizenship when your comfort and your lives are at stake. When you're being slandered for going to church.

[15 : 14] When you are missing out on promotions because of your allegiance to Jesus. When your parents refuse to talk to you because Christ is your king. But Paul says, don't panic.

Don't give up. Even when it looks like the world has the upper hand, you are already part of the winning team. You are citizens of heaven and they are not.

So stick with it. Don't switch teams just because the other side promises you an easier life. And when the going gets tough, stand side by side with your fellow believers.

Lock arms. Hold the line. Because that's what citizens of heaven do. For in the end, brothers and sisters, it will all have been worth it.

After all, suffering is not a sign that you've lost. It's a sign that you're part of the winning team. So have this shared mindset among yourselves.

[16 : 20] Now that doesn't mean that we should chase suffering, we shouldn't glorify it, we shouldn't romanticize it. You don't have to purposely seek it out. That's not my point. But friends, if we back down from our Christian convictions when we are challenged or opposed, then just maybe we don't identify as heavenly citizens as much as we ought to.

So will you bravely stand amidst suffering for the gospel? Because, brothers and sisters, there's also an encouragement to be found here.

if everything we've seen about suffering is true, then this also means that your suffering is not unique.

Every gospel citizen shares in it. Now the timing, the seasons, and the nature of that suffering might change. It might vary in intensity, and yes, frankly, there are some of us who will have it harder than others, but we are all in this together as fellow saints and as fellow sufferers of Christ.

So be ready to support our brothers and sisters when suffering comes. For if you are of this shared mindset, you will find greater reason not to retreat to your own comfort and solace in suffering.

[17 : 54] Instead, you can share your burdens with one another. That's liberating, isn't it? You don't suffer alone.

You have a whole community here who you can rely on and depend on. You have a whole community here who is here to support you, whether that may be in material ways, but also with the words of the Lord.

you have a whole community here who is there to pray with you as you toil for the King. So suffering shouldn't be a reason to retreat.

It should be a reason to stand firm as one spirit, striving together for the faith of the gospel. people. So Paul is saying, don't be a passive sufferer, be an active sufferer, which is why Paul then moves on to the second point for today, which is to seek the good of others.

in chapter 2, verse 3 to 4, he gives another radical instruction. If you want to be people who are conducting your citizenship in a manner worthy of the gospel, then do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

[19 : 15] Rather, in humility, we should value others above ourselves, not looking to our own interests, but each of us to the interest of others.

I mean, wow, that's much easier said than done, isn't it? Isn't suffering enough? Must we also put others ahead of ourselves?

And Paul says, yes. And again, behind each radical call to action, there is the radical gospel truth. Why should we be seeking the good of others?

Because us as heavenly citizens, we already have everything we need, especially to care for our heavenly citizens. And that's exactly the point that Paul is driving at in verse 1.

But if we read this, we need to be careful with his language here, for when Paul says that word if, he's not asking a question.

[20 : 21] So it's not like saying, for example, if I, Jeremy, show up in church today, then I will preach the sermon. But if I don't show up in church today, then Pastor Brian will have my head.

Now, that's not what he's saying. When Paul is using the word if here, he's saying it's already true. And so, this is how you should act.

you can think of it like this. If I see my wife struggling to carry a heavy box, and I say to her, dear, if I'm your husband, then let me help you.

Don't worry, the marriage is not in trouble. I'm not questioning our marriage license. But what I am saying is, I am your husband, so let me do what the husband does.

And so, Paul here is saying, you are citizens of heaven. This is how you should live. So, in chapter 2, verse 1, what does Paul say is a given if you are a citizen of heaven?

[21 : 29] Firstly, he says, you have encouragement from being united in Christ. Now, dwell on that for a moment. What blessings are ours if we are united with Christ?

Well, being united with Christ means we have treasures this world cannot threaten. We are justified by his death. We are adopted as children of God.

We are forgiven completely, secure forever. And that list goes on and on and on. And is that not all the encouragement you need?

Secondly, we have comfort in his love. Now, why can we enjoy all those blessings we just heard? because of one reason above all, God's love.

He loved us enough to send his son to die on the cross for our sins. And such love, friends, meets us where we are as humans.

[22 : 30] For we are relational beings. We long for connection. We long for bonds. We long for acceptance. so it hurts us, doesn't it, when people reject us.

And when do we fear rejection the most? When they see the worst in us. When they see our sin, our failures, our hearts.

When they see the true and honest us. That's when rejection hurts the most, because they've rejected who you really are.

But God, despite knowing all this, despite knowing the ugliness of our hearts, still chooses to love us. Not the sin, but the person.

And friends, he literally loves us to death. So, whatever curveballs life throws our way, we can take comfort in the fact that God loves us.

[23 : 35] And thirdly, we have a common sharing in the spirit. We have a fellowship with the Holy Spirit, who now dwells within us, sealing us for the new creation.

But notice that the emphasis Paul puts here is actually on our common sharing. We all share in the one spirit.

And that, friends, ultimately leads us to tenderness and compassion. that is the ultimate outworking of all the gospel truths we've just looked at.

After all, are we not partakers in the same gospel? We all share the same blessings of Christ that cannot be taken away. And as that gospel takes deep root in our hearts, it leads us to deeper feelings of love and concern and mercy for one another.

So, brothers and sisters, if all these things we've just talked about are true, and they are, then the natural result, verse 2, make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, and being one in spirit, and of one mind.

[24 : 54] If we share the same blessings in Christ, then we share the same life together as heavenly citizens. so no one is greater than anyone else.

We are all on equal footing before God, in the kingdom of God. For we are all saved by one gospel. We are all united by one spirit.

And that means it's only natural, isn't it, to care for your fellow citizens, especially in their time of need, the same way you would care for your family member in their time of need.

Did you notice that these blessings, again, are all communal? We are united and called into a relationship with a Trinitarian God. We are to love and serve one another.

So, these blessings, friends, are only experienced fully in a community. Now, let me put it bluntly now. you can only fully enjoy these blessings of God if you do so in a community.

[26 : 05] You cannot live lives worthy of the gospel alone. You cannot be united to Christ alone. And despite what the culture is going to tell you about self-love and self-care, you cannot love alone.

You cannot show tenderness and compassion to a mirror. Now, to be clear, being like-minded citizens doesn't mean that you have to see eye to eye on every single minor detail or to affirm everyone else 100% of the time.

However, it does mean that we should be willing to limit or even lay down our rights when it is for the good of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Or as verse 3 puts it, you should do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. For such self-glorifying acts are not actions worthy of a gospel citizen.

Rather than thinking my way or the highway, we ought to think about how we can be giving up our wants and sometimes even our needs for the good of others.

[27 : 21] Now, we all know that this doesn't come naturally to our sinful hearts. Our daily and natural inclination is to value ourselves, our needs, our wants, me, me, me, above everyone else.

But if you keep this gospel mindset amongst yourselves, that you are all of the same life team, then you can care for one another. For you all share in one faith and spirit, and with it, the same blessings that you will not lose.

Now, what would that look like for us today? It would mean being ready to give up our preferences for the sake of the gospel and for others. It would mean letting go of what I want for the sake of the team.

So here's an example. Maybe you have a particular preference in terms of musical style, or you generally like hymns more than choruses, or vice versa.

And so, maybe you personally find it hard to sing along when some songs come on for Sunday service. But friends, if the songs we end up singing are theologically sound and musically appropriate, if you look around in your frustration and notice, wait a minute, the rest of the church seems to be joyfully singing together, then maybe it's okay to not insist on your way.

[28 : 55] So sing heartily, not for yourself, but for your brothers and sisters. Maybe it's okay to do that when it's reaching people it otherwise wouldn't.

Put others first. Or maybe you don't like joining your fellow church members for fellowship time after service, because the places they pick for lunch are not really to your liking.

But what if your presence could really help someone feel more connected to the church? What if you could help others or maybe even be helped yourself to understand the sermon better as you chew on it over your lunch?

Put others first. For yielding your preferences for the sake of others is not a sign of weakness. On the contrary, it's a sign of gospel maturity.

So how about inconveniencing yourself for those around you? I mean, we all love and value our weekend time. I know I do. We value our church time.

[30 : 05] We want to enjoy hanging out with our home group members, our family members, our friends, before, during, and after the service. But this passage is challenging us to put our ones aside when we step into these halls for the sake of the others.

So maybe we can give up some of that time before or after the service to help the newcomer feel welcome. It could mean not using insider jargon just because we've been here for 10 years so we can help the person who's only been coming here for one year.

put others first. Maybe we can push aside our Asian tendencies to mind our own business and start a conversation however awkward it may be with a brother or sister who's looking down on Sunday morning.

Put others first. Or maybe there's a brother or sister whom you felt annoyed at in your heart because they spent 10 minutes telling you about their problems when you just wanted to get past them for coffee.

Friends, that's not right. Put others first. So the question then to ask yourself is this, how can I make life in church a little easier for someone else?

[31 : 28] Maybe pray that as a prayer and God will show you the many ways you've given into selfish ambition. Ask for his forgiveness forgiveness. And pray that God will show you new ways to put others first.

Now, I know this is costly. It cuts against every instinct we have, but here's the thing. Paul isn't asking us to do this in our own strength.

For he's about to show us the ultimate model for putting others first. And that's of course, Christ Jesus himself. Which brings us to our third point.

share the mindset of Christ. Verse 5, In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

Again, how do we put others first when everything in us screams me first? Paul's answer, you need to think like Jesus thought. The work of Christ, who he is, what he did for us, that is the engine that drives our other-centeredness amidst a world of suffering.

[32 : 44] Verses 6-11 show us how Jesus is both our chief ruler and our chief servant, setting the model for the Christian life, and it starts by looking at the pre-incarnate Christ.

Christ. Verse 6-7, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage, rather, he made himself nothing, by taking the very nature of a servant and being made in human likeness.

So let's meditate on what these verses are saying. Christ, in his essence and nature, is fully God. God. But here's the thing, even though he's the supreme being, the source of all creation, he doesn't grasp at his privileges.

You know, all that power, all that glory, all that comfort, he doesn't cling to them the way we know we would the moment we even get a taste. No.

Christ, in verse 7, chooses instead to make himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant. Brothers and sisters, that alone is astonishing, for here is the king of glory exchanging his throne for a manger, exchanging the streets of gold for the dust of Galilee, exchanging the worship of angels for the mockery of soldiers.

[34 : 16] Why? Because he wasn't looking out for his own interest, he was looking out for yours. He was serving you. Now, make no mistake, Jesus never stopped being God.

When the text says he became nothing, it doesn't mean that he lost his divinity, rather, he clothed it in humanity. He added the nature of a servant, and in doing so, Jesus reveals that God's true greatness is revealed not in power or status, but in selfless service.

And Jesus didn't stop there now. For verse 8, as a man, what did he do? He humbled himself further, becoming obedient to death, even death, on a cross.

Again, why? Because Christ, in his humility, seeks the good of others above himself. He let his body be broken for us, and he shed his blood for us, because he puts sinners first.

Think about that. You find it hard to put Christians first? Jesus put his executioners first. That is the mindset of Christ.

[35 : 38] And it's this mindset that God the Father receives and rewards. In verse 9, Jesus is exalted to the highest place, and given 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 acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Yes, Jesus was always king, but now, having served to the point of death, he is publicly vindicated. He is universally acknowledged, his kingdom is secure, and that kingdom is filled with all the people whom he saved, worshipping him forever and ever as Lord.

Brothers and sisters, this gospel is not just a story about Jesus. It's also your story, for if you belong to him, you will share this eternal privilege, worshipping him forever as Lord.

God's love. And yet, if you want to have that privilege, you have to accept a somewhat uncomfortable truth. And it's that Jesus sets the pattern.

Glory comes after suffering. Reward comes after service. The crown comes after the cross.

[37 : 09] before you can fully enjoy your heavenly citizenship and reign with Jesus for all eternity, we wrestle with suffering. There is still death.

But just like we saw last week, friends, we need not fear death, for it is our great gain. And while we wait for that day, as we continue to hear the gospel preached week after week, as we allow it to take deep root in our hearts, as it transforms and unites our mindsets, we will find it more and more natural to put others above ourselves the way Christ did.

Do you believe that? Then ask God for it. Now let me show you what this looks like in real life. Two young Moravian missionaries named Johan Dober and David Nishman, I hope I'm pronouncing that right, took that gospel call to heart.

They wanted to minister to African slaves, but they couldn't because by law, only slaves could talk to other slaves.

So what did they do? They sold themselves to a slave owner and boarded a ship bound for the West Indies. And as the ship pulled away from the docks, they reportedly cried out to their loved ones, May the lamb that was slain receive the reward of his suffering.

[38 : 35] May the lamb that was slain receive the reward of his suffering. So brothers and sisters, let's come back to that image we saw at the start, that living raft of fire ants.

Now imagine a church that clings together like that when the floodwaters of suffering rise. A church that doesn't scatter when the pressures come, but stands firm in one's spirit.

A church that looks not to its own comfort, but to the needs of others. A church shaped by the mindset of Christ, humbling itself, giving itself, and serving sacrificially.

Then let's ask, will we, as a church, live like that? Will we stand firm together when life gets hard, serve one another even when it costs, Christ, and let Christ's mindset shape every decision and every relationship?

And I ask this because the gospel calls us to nothing less. So friends, as fellow citizens of heaven, let's stand firm together, especially when hardship comes.

[39 : 48] Let's seek the good of others, and above all, let's think like Christ, for the glory of God, for the sake of others, and for the advance of our shared heavenly kingdom.

Let's pray. Our dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your great love, for sending Christ Jesus, who did not grasp at his divinity, but willingly came to die on the cross for our sins.

And thank you for raising him up in glory, that we all, having been forgiven, of our sins, will one day reign in glory with him. So teach us while we wait to have the shared mindset of Christ, to think how he thinks, to do as he did, to relate to one another in humility, and to put others first, to seek their good first, and to do so even when we are suffering for your gospel.

So may you empower us by the Holy Spirit to be a church that conducts our citizenship in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.