

## Palm Sunday

### Philippians 2:5-11

Many years ago, when I was a young man, which is many years ago, during a Bible Study, we read what we just heard today of the Word of God, and the invited speaker asked: *Whom is this about?* Of course, some suggested the obvious; the speaker, though, responded, with a triumphant smirk, that this was not about our Lord Jesus and what He sacrificed and suffered for the salvation of sinners, rather, he said, that which we just heard of Holy Scripture is all about *us*.

He did have a point; with what we hear today, our Lord Jesus is indeed set before us as an example and model for how Christians should live and conduct ourselves; or rather, He is set before us as an example and inspiration for what kind of *attitude* Christians should adopt and learn from Him. As we hear it, the tone is set with the exhortation: *Let this mind be in you which is and was also in Christ Jesus*.

Nevertheless, it would be extremely difficult, would it not, not to hear the love of our Lord Jesus for us sinners praised and proclaimed in what we hear today of Holy Scripture, what He has sacrificed and suffered. Well, for a *Christian* it would be difficult; for those who will not hear it, it might not be. Among those who claim to be Christian there are those who, even in what we hear today, hear nothing other than admonition and instruction as to how Christians should live and behave; no matter how forcefully the love of God is presented to them, what the Son of God has suffered and sacrificed for the salvation of sinners, and how, by His sufferings and sacrifice, full forgiveness for all sin has been won for all sinners, and is given freely to sinners out of His goodness and mercy alone and for no other reason whatsoever, whenever they hear it, they will immediately skip over it and move on to how Christians should live and behave; so firmly are their hearts fixed on themselves and their own rather than the things of God.

Still, it cannot be denied, now, can it, that although the love of our Lord Jesus is being proclaimed and praised in what we hear today, how He sacrificed and suffered for our salvation, His love is *also* being set before us an example and inspiration for the attitude Christians should adopt; ever so much less can this be denied, when we take into consideration that which goes immediately before what we hear today; and so, by all means, let us.

*If there is any consolation in Christ, the Apostle has written, any comfort of love, any communion of the Spirit, any affection and mercy, fulfil my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.* So the first way in which the Apostle admonishes Christians to have the same mind as that which was and is in Christ Jesus is to agree in *faith and doctrine*, so that all embrace the common faith of the Church of Christ.

Now, what does this have to do with having the same mind as that which was and is in Christ Jesus? Well, it has to do with *humility*, with acknowledging that you are not God, which means that what pleases you and makes you *feel good* might not be what is pleasing to God, that what you feel might not be what is real, that there might be things you do not know, that you should not assume that you are better and more spiritual than the Church of Christ, and *know better*, so that the Church must submit to you and convert to whatever exciting new teaching you might find out there in the world outside; well, you should not be out there looking for new teachings in the first place!

Of course, if you really seriously believe that the Truth of God is not what is taught in this church, you should be honest about it and not lie and claim this church as *your church*. *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers*, as the Apostle writes it elsewhere, *for what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? What communion has light with darkness?* But if you believe that this congregation is the Church of Christ in this place, you should have the humility to listen and learn from His Church, and take what she teaches to heart, so that she, as her Master wills it, and the Apostle, may be *like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind*.

Furthermore, the Apostle writes: *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only to his own, but also to that of others.* The love in which Christians should live together is one of *humility*, also, or *lowliness of mind*, acknowledging that others are at least as important as yourself, their needs no less important than your *wishes*, how they think and feel no less important than what you think, and how they *actually* think and feel no less important than how you *think* they should feel.

And just how important all this is is evident in how the Apostle prefaces his plea, as we heard it: *If there is any consolation in Christ, any comfort of love, any communion of the Spirit, any affection and mercy ...*

In other words, not to care about others in Church, what their needs are, and how they think and feel, and judge everything according to your own personal and private preferences, that is to treat the faith itself as not being *for real*, and the things of God altogether, as if there really is no consolation in Christ, no comfort of love, no communion of the Spirit, no affection and mercy, as if all that we say in Church is just that, just something that we say in Church.

And all this the Apostle sums up in the admonition: *Let this mind be in you which is and was also in Christ Jesus*. And then he moves on to set our Lord Jesus before us as an example and model for the attitude a Christian should adopt. And obviously, as he does that, he also sets our Lord Jesus before us as our Saviour, and our salvation, and praises His love which is made manifest in how He sacrificed all, and suffered all, for our salvation.

He who was *in the form of God*, the Apostle writes, *did not consider it something to be clung to to be equal with God, rather, He made Himself to be nothing and took the form of a servant*. You might even say that He made Himself not only to be *nothing*, but less than nothing, to become Himself all that is abominable to Him, evil and ungodliness and impurity. For not only did He have Himself born into sinful Mankind, He also had Himself baptised with the Baptism of sinners and made one with sin itself, and made to be sin, as the Apostle writes it elsewhere, *Him who knew of no sin God made to be sin for us, that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*.

Yes, for all the Son of God sacrificed and suffered He sacrificed and suffered for our salvation, out of His love for us, as well as out of His love for the Father, whose will it was, from eternity, to reveal the fullness of His goodness by having the Son suffer for the salvation of sinners.

Therefore the Son of God left His heavenly home in glory behind, and the blessed presence of the Father, and came to us, out of the eternal love of God, to endure for us and with us a lifetime in this world of suffering and sorrow and sin, for our salvation.

And therefore He would hide away His heavenly glory all through His life in this world, and use His heavenly powers only for the benefit of others rather than His own. Although by speaking His own eternal name: *I Am!*, He would cause those who came to arrest Him to fall to the ground, He gave Himself over into their hands to be taken away to judgement and death, *even death upon a cross*, as the Apostle writes it.

And death upon a cross would for Him be death into the judgement of God, eternal death and destruction, as He had had it written of Himself in the Law: *The hanged Man is a curse to God.* So profound a Truth is it that He made Himself to be nothing that He was made to *be sin*, and to be judged and damned and destroyed as such. And this is our salvation, that our sin has been judged and destroyed with Him, and in Him, and it is no more in the sight of God, and God knows not of it because He *will* not know of it, but counts it as all dealt with and done away with.

The Son has fulfilled the Father's will, and His own, what God the Father and the Son and the Spirit resolved in His heart from eternity to do to rescue His most beloved creatures from the eternal agony of Hell unto the heavenly life of glory that is His Kingdom.

*Therefore God has also highly exalted Him*, the Apostle then writes, *and bestowed upon Him the name which is above every name.* Because of what He has suffered for our salvation, God has highly exalted Him who was always the Most High, and the most exalted, and bestowed upon Him whose name was always above all names an even greater name, the name of *Saviour*. So precious is our salvation to God; even He who knows all things knows of no greater name, no greater glory.

And God has highly exalted the Most High in order that, as the Apostle writes it, *at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of those in Heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and every tongue confess, to the glory of God the Father, that Jesus Christ is Lord.*

All shall glorify the Son, to the glory of God the Father; for it is in the Son that God the Father is glorified, by how He has sacrificed and suffered for the salvation of sinners; and what God the Father seeks is the glory of the Son, His most beloved, because of how the Son has sacrificed and suffered for our salvation, for nothing is more precious to God than our salvation, and yours. So good is God, so great His love for us sinners, so great His love for you.

And so it is really all about our Lord Jesus, all about His salvation, what He has sacrificed and suffered for us. Even when He is set before us as an example and inspiration for how we should live, and what attitude we should adopt, He is set before us, also, as our Saviour; not only because it is by His Word of salvation that He works His will in us, but also because to God, our salvation *is* what all is all about, as it should be to us, also, always.

O Christ, our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us! *Amen.*