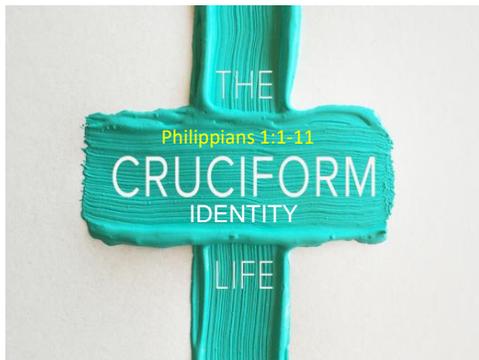


1



*Easter is only six weeks away, and in many churches this is when they begin preparing themselves by practicing spiritual disciplines of prayer & fasting to center their lives upon the cross over a six week period known as Lent.*

With that in mind, on the Sunday many churches will be *beginning Lent*, we're going to start a *Bible series* that'll run beyond Easter, which *like Lent*, will help us (I hope) *centre our lives* upon what *Jesus did on the Cross*.

*Paul's letter to the Philippian church* will be our *biblical text* because (like Lent) this is a letter that's *centered around* what Jesus did on the cross, and *also like Lent*, is a letter that was written to *help the church* centre our lives upon the cross.

Which is why I'm calling the series "*Cruciformity*".

So let's *start at the very beginning*, (it's a very good place to start!) by reading *Philippians 1:1-11*.

2

### Philippians 1:11

<sup>1</sup> Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you.

<sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,

Phil 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,

3

### Philippians 1:11

<sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.

<sup>8</sup> God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

<sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

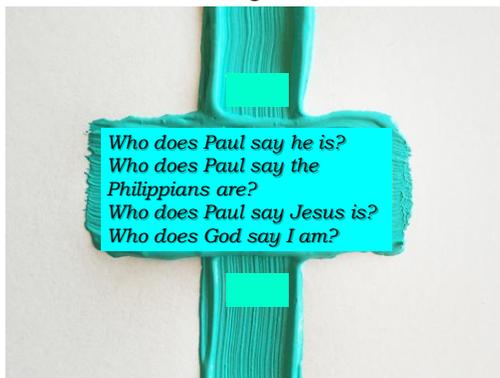
<sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.

<sup>8</sup> God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

### Philippians 1:11

<sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, <sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

<sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, <sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.



This week I've been reading the *latest issue of the Baptist Magazine*, which (by the way) if you *aren't* already getting a copy of, and would like to, just let the church office know so we can order enough for you as well.

The latest issue of the Baptist magazine is about *Identity: Who do you say I am? The importance of understanding our identity before God.*

*Richard Cook* is a counseling tutor from *Bethlehem Tertiary Institute*, and the author of the first article in the latest edition of the Baptist magazine.

As I was reading it I began realising how *his article* about *identity*, can help us understand what *Paul is saying in these opening verses* about the Philippians *cruciform identity in Christ*.

What Paul is telling the church of Philippi, in these introductory verses, is that *they are a work in progress, being made into the cruciform pattern of Christ*.

Which is what Richard Cook intriguingly calls, '*a spirituality of imperfection*'.

- *Who does Paul say he is?*
- *Who does Paul say the people of the Philipian church are?*
- *Who does Paul say Jesus is?*

These are the questions we'll be asking Paul, from which we'll be answering the question:

- *Who does God say I am?*

### Who does Paul say he is?

#### **Who does Paul say he is? Phil 2:1-11**

- Servant/slave of Jesus Christ (v1)
- Aligned with the cruciform pattern of Christ

If someone asked me: "*Who do you say you are?*"  
I'd *probably* tell them that:

- I'm the *pastor of Te Puke Baptist church*, and have been for the last 13 years.
- If I thought it'd impress them, I *might* even say I'm the *senior pastor* of Te Puke Baptist Church.
  
- I'm married to *Raewyn*,
- I have *three sons* (two at university, one at high school), and *one teenage daughter* (actually two teenage daughters at present including our international student from Germany who's with us for 6 months!).
  
- I'm the *son of Ron and Eleanor Keyte*.
- My *Father* was a *chaplain in the airforce*, but he died in an aircraft accident when I was 14.
- My *Mother* lives in *Feilding*, where I grew up as a teenager along with my *two sisters*.
  
- I might include my *university qualifications* from *Massey University* and *Carey Baptist Theological College*.
  
- Before going on to list my *sporting interests: running* and more recently *cycling*, I might even bore them, with a few of my *running accomplishments*.
  
- *Finally* I might tell them a little bit about my *personality*. I'm a bit of an *introvert*, and an *internal processor*, which they'd figure out for themselves, after getting to know me for a bit.

That's probably how I'd answer the question: *Who do you say you are?*

If someone asked *you* that question, the details would no doubt be different, but I *wouldn't be surprised* if you described yourself along similar lines: your occupation is, marital status, and family, your qualifications, interests, and personality. These are all common ways of describing ourselves.

But that's *not* how Paul describes himself in his letter to the Philippians.

Paul begins by describing *himself and Timothy* (who the letter is also from) simply as *servants of Jesus Christ*. **6a**

The word *douloi* he uses is the same word the Greeks used for their *household slaves*, which was a *common occupation* back then.

In using *douloi* of Christ as the *metaphor* for describing himself, Paul *doesn't mean it* in the way we often think of slaves as *disposable human tools* who were cruelly exploited and abused by their masters.

He's using the metaphor of a slave to describe his *total allegiance, his complete faithfulness, his unwavering loyalty, and utter obedience* to Christ as *his master* who had called him to take part in *God's mission in the world*.

Describing himself as a *slave of Christ* is quite a contrast to the '*Senior pastor of Te Puke Baptist Church!*' title I describe myself by!

But Paul's *humility* in calling himself a *slave of Christ* is emphasised further by the *edifying title* he gives to the members and leaders of the Philippian church.

He *doesn't* just write: "*Dear church*" (like I might do when I write a letter to the church).

He calls them *hagiois* in Christ which means *God's holy people*, (or '*saints*' as some translations say).

Which is *reminiscent* of how God called the people of Israel to be set apart as his *Holy people* by obeying the laws given to Moses.

*Whereas* the Philippian church are *God's holy people because of their relationship to God in Christ!*

By his *humble* self description as a *servant of Christ*, and by *honouring and edifying* the Philippian church as *God's Holy People in Christ*, Paul has *straight off* aligned *himself and the church* with the *cruciform pattern of Christ!* (We'll find out more about that soon) **6b**

In *Richard Cook's* article in the *Baptist magazine* that I read while preparing this message, he tells about a *defining moment* for him as a boy, being *applauded* for his starring role in the musical *Oliver*. This experience affirmed the *English cultural norms* that *shaped his life* while growing up. He learned that *'keeping up appearances'* and *'getting it right'* was how to *gain approval* and *get ahead* in life. Submission to these *cultural expectations* began forming in him an *identity* based upon what *he thought he should be, an achiever*.

He writes, *"yes it offered the possibility that I could gain the whole world, but it never told me that I could lose my soul!"*

Driven by an *inner anxiety- a terror* that he could *lose it all at any moment*, Cook lived by this *false identity* as an achiever for over 30 years, exacting an *unsustainable toll* upon his *soul*, his *health*, his *marriage*, and his *relationships!*

An *achiever* is just one of the *false identities* that our culture may shape us into. *Popular, cool, tough, trendy, sexy, self reliant*, are some of the other *false identities* that our culture shapes us into through thinking we're *winning people's applause!*

*Richard Cook* writes that this *constructed identity*, or *false self* became the *very thing* that God seemed most intent on *breaking in me!*

Paul, *on the other hand*, humbly tells the Philippian church *nothing of his evangelistic accomplishments* (impressive as they were), and avoids even mentioning his *status as an apostle*, preferring to simply identify himself with the *one whom his life was moulded upon as a servant of Christ*.

I *must remember* that next time someone asks me: *who do you say you are?*

### **Who does Paul say the Philippian church is? Phil 2:1-11**

- God's holy people in Christ at Philippi (v1)
- Already reliable partners in the gospel (v5)
- Already under process of conformation to Christ (v6)
- Already share in God's saving grace (v7)
- Becoming people who love God and others more (v9)
- Becoming a people who know their identity in Christ (v9,10)
- Becoming people filled with the fruit of righteousness from Christ (v11)
- Becoming people of praise & glory to God (v11)

We've already looked at how Paul *honoured and edified* the Philippian church by calling them *God's holy people in Christ*.

But there's *quite a bit more* we can learn from these opening verses about *who Paul says the people of the Philippian church are*.

Next he describes them as being *located at Philippi, 7a* a small but *strategically located city* built on the hillside, just above a fertile, well watered plain, about 10 miles inland from the important port of *Neapolis*.

The *Egnatian highway* linking *Rome* with its *eastern provinces*, passed through Philippi's *city centre*.

Large numbers of the Philippian population were descended from *Roman soldiers* who had settled there after a great battle was fought there following the assassination of *Julius Caesar*. Because of this, the city proudly attained and maintained its *Roman character*.

Paul *founded the church at Philippi* (which you can read about in Acts 16), a congregation that initially consisted of a *wealthy business woman named Lydia* and her household, a *jailer* and his family, and quite possibly a *slave girl* whom Paul had delivered from an evil spirit.

*This is the church Paul joyfully offers a prayer of thanksgiving for, thanking God for who they already are in Christ,*

quickly followed by a *second prayer* petitioning God to *keep on forming them* into the people they are *destined to become* ready for the *day of Christ's return*.

From his *thanksgiving prayer*, we see *who* the Philippian Christians *already are in Christ*.

They *already are reliable partners* with Paul in the gospel (v5) **7b** which they've *proven* by supporting Paul *whatever his circumstances*, whether as a *prisoner in chains* (as he presently was) or *free* to preach the gospel (v7) (as he hoped he soon would be).

They *already are* a people in the *process of conformation to Christ* who began a good work in them and will carry it on until *completion* upon Christ's return. (v6) **7c**

And they *already are* a people who *share in God's saving grace* with Paul, through the *good news of Jesus Christ*. (v7). **7d**

Then from Paul's *prayer of petition* for the Philippian church, we learn *who they are becoming* through the *process of conformation* that's already underway in them.

They are *becoming people who love God and others more and more*. (v9) **7d**

They are *becoming people* with the *knowledge and depth of insight about their identity in Christ necessary for discerning what's best and pure and blameless in preparation for the day of Christ*. (v9,10) **7c**

They are *becoming people filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ*. (v11) **7e**

And they are *becoming people who bring glory and praise to God!* (v11). **7f**

Isn't that an *awesome description* of *who* the people of the Philippian church *already are in Christ*, and *who they are becoming* through the process of *spiritual conformation to Christ!*

Richard Cook in his Baptist magazine article recognises something similar going on in his life. He writes: 'The transformational journey surprised me. I thought it would be about me gaining victory and strength. Instead it has been embracing my inadequacy, surrendering in the small moments when failure or disapproval confront me, it's what has been called a "spirituality of imperfection" which is about accepting a different story in which I am a little one, poor, pitiful, blind, and naked desperately in need of the riches that only God can give in an ongoing revelation.'

Looking at this list describing who the people of the Philippian church *already were in Christ*, and who they were *becoming for Christ*, could you say, that's a *good description* of *who you are*, and *who we are* as people of *Te Puke Baptist church?*

- We are *already God's holy people in Te Puke*
- We are *already in partnership with Christ in the work of the gospel*,
- We are *already in the process of conformation to Christ*,
- We are *already sharing in God's saving grace*.
  
- Yet we are also *becoming people whose love for God and others is increasing more and more*.
- We are *becoming people who know our identity in Christ*.
- We are *becoming people filled with the fruit of righteousness from Jesus Christ*.
- and we are *becoming people who bring praise & glory to God*.

Richard Cook describes *himself and others like him* as people who have '*accepted we are desperately in need of the riches that only God can give in an ongoing revelation which is what he calls a 'spirituality of imperfection'*'.

## Who does Paul say Jesus is?

8

### Who does Paul say Jesus is?

Phil 2:6-11

Jesus:

- same nature as God (2:6)
- equal to God (v6)
- doesn't use his divine status for his advantage (v6)
- gave everything up by taking on the nature of a human servant/slave (v7)
- Humbled himself by obedience to death on a cross
- Exalted to the highest place (v9)
- Given the name above all names (v9)
- Everyone will bow before (v10)
- Everyone will acknowledge Jesus as Lord (v11)
- Glorifies God the Father (v11)

One question remains to be answered.  
Who does Paul say Jesus is?

I said at the start that Paul's letter to the Philippian church (like Lent) , is intended to *help the church centre our lives upon the cross*, and in doing so we become *cruciformed*- as we are conformed to the *cruciform pattern of Christ*.

The *cruciform pattern of Christ* is described in what's probably an *early Christian worship song*, that Paul strategically places at the *core of his letter* in chapter 2 verses 6-11,

In this *cruciform hymn* we hear who Paul says Jesus is:

- Jesus has the same nature as God (2:6) **8a**
- Jesus is equal to God (v6) **8b**
- Jesus *didn't* use his divine status for his own advantage (v6) **8c**
- Jesus *gave everything up* by taking on the nature of a human *doulos*, servant or slave (v7) **8d**
- Jesus *humbled himself* by becoming *obedient to death on a cross* (v8). **8e**

But then the tone of the hymn *suddenly changes* from *self-sacrifice, servanthood, obedience and humility* to a mood of *triumph* as it sings about how:

- Jesus has been *exalted to the highest place by God!* (2:9) **8f**
- God has given him the *name above all names!* (v9) **8g**
- before which *everyone in the universe will bow!* (v10) **8h**

- as *everyone* acknowledges *Jesus Christ as Lord!* (v11) **8i**
- to the *glory of God the Father!* (v11) **8j**

*This is who Paul says Jesus is!*

This is who Paul describes as the *template* to whom the *Philippian church* are being conformed to.

The *cruciform template* for all the *holy people of God in Christ* who are becoming *conformed to the cruciform pattern of Christ!*

*Richard Cook* describes his own experience of this *conformational process* at work in his life like this:

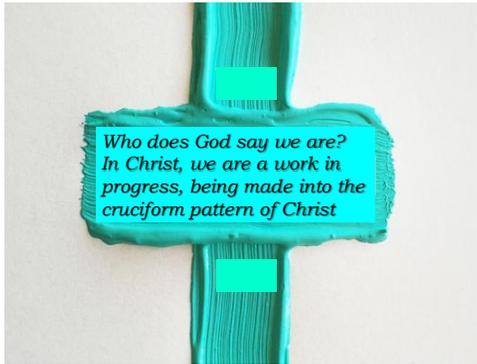
The ugliness of my pride and escapes has brought me to the *foot of the cross* many times- sometimes daily. *Without the cross* I would still be carrying the patterns, the guilt, the shame, and the sense of identity that destroy. The cross. *Not* a well-polished, shiny, sanitised version that most of us are familiar with. *No-* a rugged, blood-splattered, *torture machine* with flaking flesh still intact. *My flesh, Jesus flesh, made one with my flesh.* And this is my *only hope*, my *best hope*, my *glorious hope*. For the truth about the *identity of 'me'* is *not found in performance, achievement or approval*: those needs point to a much deeper truth- *that I am completely in need of saving from myself!*

So now I am living in a *new reality*. I am connected to the *dancing Trio* (of The Father, The Son, and The Spirit) who love me and smile at the pure *unnecessariness* of my anxious striving, and relapses into performance and achievement.

*They smile*, I think, because *they know the truth-* and this bigger, truer, grander, more glorious story *eclipses the best* I could do *even on my very best day ever*. *My identity is not referenced in me*. It is *not* determined by me. It is *not* affected by me *even by the worst I've done on the worst day ever*. Such is the over-powering, over-arching enormity of this true story. *My identity is not about me*. It really is *all about him...!*

So who does God say we are?

9



In Christ, we are *a work in progress, being made into the cruciform pattern of Christ!*