

"Incarnational Witness"

Ephesians 5:1-20; Philippians 2:1-11

Rev. Bradley D. Long

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Review: We enter this week the 2nd installment of our "fly-by" of the book of Philippians. If you didn't get the chance to our the past week, I would encourage you this week to take 20 or 30 minutes to read straight through this short, 4 chapter letter!

Last week we introduced this letter of Paul and looked at the following:

- 1) How true freedom is not being free to do whatever we think is best for ourselves (see Judges 17:6), but that freedom in Christ is freedom from our sinful selves for Jesus and serving him.
- 2) How this true freedom directly connects to what confidence in Jesus (as opposed to self-confidence) produces in us: Risk, Routine, Relationship, and Rejoicing.
- 3) In particular, we looked at **Risk**.
Phil. 1:14, "And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear."

Confidence in Jesus deepens not only reliance on Jesus, but risk-taking for Jesus.

- 4) Finally, we began to look at a model for missional living that can help us live out our faith in ways that will naturally introduce others to Jesus. And Risk is often the first step in living out the confidence in Jesus that our faith provides to us.

This week we move onto the next 2 R's – Routine and Relationship. This week we will strike at the heart of what missional living, according to Philippians, can look like!

Our passage from Philippians includes one of the earliest statements or creeds or hymns about who Jesus is and comes in the context of Paul exhorting his readers, as he does in Ephesians 5, to imitate Christ in their own lives.

(Read Philippians 2:1-11)

We might sum up what Paul is saying here about how we live together and what that shows to others around us as Incarnational Witness.

Incarnational – When we talk about Incarnation we are usually talking about Jesus, specifically that God took on human form in Jesus Christ. There is a newer trend, however, in talking about the way that followers of Jesus live as incarnational. This is basically to say that we are called to imitate Jesus and to strive in all we do to become more like Him.

We are called to be incarnations of Jesus in everything about who we are and how we live.

Witness – We are never brought into relationship with God through Jesus *only* for our own benefit. Our connection to God is always intended to direct us beyond ourselves for the sake of others and for the glory of God. The reality of who Jesus is changes the reality of who we are called to be and God’s intent for us in becoming more like Jesus often

This type of imitation of Christ, which as we saw last week may well be Risky, involves 2 key components:

Routine – Habits, rhythms, disciplines. I do not mean that we simply go through the motions but that we become intentional about what shapes our lives.

Everyone has 2 options: To worship God or idols.

This is part of the reality that Paul understands when he writes in Phil. 2 that “Every knee should bend...and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” Obviously not all have yet bowed to Jesus as Lord, but all are currently bowing to something.

The question of routine is this: What do you fill yourself up with?

Illustration: Inviting friends into our home and then also inviting them to be a part of our family devotional time. Initially this involves risk, but it also means we have to have developed the routine of devotional time. If the habit isn’t there then our witness will seem contrived or forced.

Relationship – All of this leads to relationship – both our relationship with God through Jesus and our relationships with others. Isn’t it interesting that this early, theologically deep statement about who Jesus is comes to us because Paul is trying to others how they should relate to each other? Later in the letter he will urge two women to stop fighting with each other!

But at the same time, this isn’t a shallow relational connection. Too often our culture encourages us to opt for what’s easy – let’s just not talk about things – religion, politics, money, etc. – that we might not agree on and then we won’t have problems. Philippians says to “be of the same mind” and that the same mind we should have should be the mind of Christ.

Carmen LaBerge, “People don’t need another piece of your mind! They need the very peace of the mind of Christ, and I think you’re just the person to give it to them!”

Having Routines that keep us in Relationship with Jesus mean that when we take Risks for Jesus we put ourselves in a position to Rejoice! And Rejoicing is where we are headed as we move into our last week with Philippians! Amen.