

Introduction

- Words have colour; they have associations.
 - if you use particular words, even when they mean pretty much the same as other words, they create a particular impression, they pull in particular associations in our minds
 - that's not only true for an orator crafting a great speech, but also for the day-to-day words that pass our lips all the time
- Let me give you two examples: UP and DOWN.
 - very simple words, probably use each of them most days of our lives;
 - "down" is a word that has almost exclusively negative connotations - down and out, downfall, down-scale, downhill, down-hearted - a word to describe the situation of losers, of the most unfortunate, a word and a situation to be avoided
 - "up" on the other hand has hugely positive connotations - up-market, up-town, up and coming, upwardly mobile, upper class - a word for the chosen few, for the strong
 - up is the direction you want to go, down is the way you always try and avoid.
- From the world's perspective, up is the only direction to go.
 - in each heart there is a built-in mechanism that craves self-promotion and advancement, yearns to get on, to get established, to get up in the world
 - our role models and heroes reinforce the theme - sport, politics, academic, financial
- Why? Because up is the direction of greatness!
- That is what the world says.
 - in that context, Philippians 2 must be one of the most counter-cultural, upside down, apparently illogical chapters in the Bible
- Message is: "if you want to be truly great, then the direction you must go is down!"
 - you must descend into greatness!
 - or, as Bill Hybels put it, "The Way to Up is Down!"
- This seems utterly bizarre.... but it was the way Jesus went, and he meant us to follow
- Tonight we're going to explore this theme, and see if we can begin to understand some of its implications for our lives
 - look briefly at five areas where Jesus demonstrated that the way to up is down:

The Way to Power is Weakness (v.6)

"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped"

- Remember the British Gas advert about being in control?
 - snapping of fingers and a little flame appearing, "don't you love being in control?"
- Something we all hanker after
 - maybe not being the absolute top dog, but not being at the bottom of the pile, having some influence on what goes on around us
- Jesus demonstrated a completely different attitude - he had all the power and authority you could imagine - and then some.
 - but did he want to hang onto it? No!!
 - he consciously and willingly gave up power, to suffer the frailties of a human body, the tiredness, the need for food and water and rest, the limitation of being in only one place at a time
- Power and control all about making things happen - things, hopefully, of lasting value.
 - what Jesus demonstrated is that making things happen in the Kingdom of God is about choosing the path of weakness
 - when he came to earth to bring salvation, to buy our freedom, our redemption,

he came in weakness...

- ...he let go of the power, for in God's Kingdom the way to real power is through weakness

The Way to Security is Vulnerability (v.7a)

"but made himself nothing"

- Second dimension - way to security is vulnerability.
- Jesus gave up absolutely everything - left himself totally vulnerable as he came to earth.
 - all the "possessions" of heaven, all the familiarity, all the comfort, all the identity (people knowing who he really was, giving him the respect he was due, ...) - all given up
 - to become a baby in a stable in Bethlehem, an infant on the run, a man who didn't have a permanent home or, apparently, any property of his own, whose possessions were scanty, and whose family even thought he was mad, who never wrote a book or led an army, who never even married and had children - who gave up all sources of identity and security, made himself vulnerable, to pain, hurt ("Jesus wept", John 11:35)
- Rather he found his ultimate fulfillment, security, identity in accomplishing his Father's task

The Way to Greatness is Servanthood (v.7b)

"taking the very nature of a servant"

- See next one - closely linked.

The Way to Glory is Humility (v.8a)

"he humbled himself"

- Two bits of verses that point us in the same direction.
- For us, humility and servant-hood kind of go together.
- Not quite the same thing, but same impression, closely related.
- Humility - giving up our rights - is not something we hear a lot about:
 - news is full of people complaining that their rights have been infringed, their right to a particular level of service or standard of treatment...
 - we are pushy, not humble, as a society.
- **For Jesus, it was the other way round**
- He left behind all his rights when he left heaven; not that they weren't still his rights, protection, honour, power - **simply he chose not to exercise them.**
- Humbled himself - most clearly modelled as he took on the role and outlook of a servant:
 - washing the disciples feet;
 - healing the crowds, teaching them, expending himself on them, even though he knew how shallow much of their interest was, for he had compassion on them;
- Took the servant's path.
 - ...and won true greatness as the only Saviour, God's precious Son with whom he is well pleased...

The Way to Freedom is Obedience (v.8b)

"and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!"

- He didn't think his own way was best, his own way was less painful, was less demanding.
- **Whatever God wanted - that was it** - that was where he was going - and in doing so he showed the way to true freedom from sin, he blazed a trail as **the one completely free of peer pressure and the expectations placed upon him:**
 - his was the freedom to break social and cultural barriers, to speak with the prostitutes, the lepers, the sinners
- And that freedom was won through obedience to God's ways. **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength"** and **"Love your neighbour as yourself"**

- Love that costs - real, self-giving, self-emptying love.

The Way to Up is Down

- "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus..."
 - let us follow his down-ward path, a path that didn't in the end lead to despair or final destruction, but to true power (the power of changed lives, our newly born lives), to true security (restored to his rightful place at the Father's side), to true greatness, to true glory, to true freedom
- For the joy set before him - he went through pain.
 - The Way to Power is Weakness (v.6)
 - The Way to Security is Vulnerability (v.7a)
 - The Way to Greatness is Servanthood (v.7b)
 - The Way to Glory is Humility (v.8a)
 - The Way to Freedom is Obedience (v.8b)
 - The Way to Up is Down!!!
- I want you to imagine a situation:
 - You are rushing to get your train home from work. You're in a busy train station - more London Kings Cross or Glasgow Central than Dundee! - its between 5pm and 5:30pm, and the place is heaving. Everyone is rushing for their trains. Organised chaos. Mostly folk know where they are going - its a journey they make every day, its boring, and they just want to get back to see their families.
 - In the midst of the bustle and the noise, an older couple in their 80's are struggling along. They are on their way to see family, and they are worried they'll miss the only direct train of the day. Between them they can hardly manage the suitcase they've packed for their trip. And they are not really sure where their platform is...
 - You are running late - your train is about to leave - you spot them - and you feel the tug of God's Spirit prompting you to help. What do you do?
 - However Christian we are, there is a huge temptation in that kind of situation to "not see" their plight, to pretend (to ourselves as much as anyone) that we didn't see them, didn't think we could help, didn't have time... And no one would ever know that we didn't help!
- We have a choice - a choice to obey, to go down, to be inconvenienced, delayed - or to disobey, to be care-less of others
- The way to up is down