

“He Came To...Deliver Us From Me-Ville”

Philippians 2:1-11

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on December 20, 2015

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Please open your Bibles to Philippians 2.
- Superbia. It’s a Latin word for pride. It means to think too highly of yourself. To be obsessed or fixated on self. It is self-absorption.
 - Superbia makes me think of the Greek myth of Narcissus. Narcissus was extremely handsome. One day he was walking in the woods. He came to a pond that was as clear as crystal. He bent down to take a drink and saw the most attractive face he had ever seen staring back at him.
 - He was so mesmerized, by what was of course his own reflection, that he forgot all about food and drink and died staring at himself.
- I have titled today’s message, “Deliver us from Me-Ville”. I took the title from a book by David Zimmerman. He says that this word “superbia” sounds like a place – like it is a suburb of some mythical city. He called this city “Me-Ville.” I like that play on words. In English and French the word “ville” means “city.” We add the word “ville” to another word that describes the city. So Parksville is literally “Parks-City”, named after the Parks family who were among the first settlers.
 - I am using the term Me-Ville to refer to a city in the human heart. This city is characterized by self-absorption. In Me-Ville self reigns. In Me-Ville self is the centre of everything.
- But here is the problem. Living for our selves does not bring the happiness we think it does. You know this in your own life. It is your self-centredness that puts you in conflict with others.
 - It is this city of self that sometimes puts me at odds with my wife. It is this city of self that leads me to think first of all about my own needs and not the needs of others.
 - Yet, despite all the pain that self-centredness brings I find myself always fighting to defend Me-Ville. I hate Me-Ville because it bring so much conflict into my life and yet I always find myself defending Me-Ville. Can you relate? And so I cry out, ***“Is there any way out of this city? Is there any way to stop being so self-absorbed?”***
- This is where the message of Christmas is such good news. Here in Philippians 2 we learn that Jesus came into the world to deliver us from Me-Ville. He loves us too much to let our self-absorption destroy us.
 - Philippians 2:1-11 will do two things for us this morning. First, it will describe what it is like to live in Me-Ville. I will call this “the way of Me-Ville.” But second, and most practically, it gives us an escape plan. I will call this “the way out of Me-Ville.”
 - So let’s look at these two things in order that we might be delivered from the self-absorption that is wrecking all of our lives.

THE WAY OF ME-VILLE

- First then, let's listen to Paul describe this city in the human heart by considering **(SHOW SLIDE)** the way of Me-Ville. If we are going to escape Me-Ville we need to realize where we are. We need to see how superbia, self-absorption, has affected all parts of our life.
 - We have a case scenario here in the ancient church in Philippi. There is a problem going on in this church. Apparently two prominent women were deeply at odds with each other. Turn over to chapter 4. **READ 2 - *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me...*** So apparently these two women, Euodia and Syntyche were at odds with each other. We don't know what they were fighting about but it was obviously causing so many problems that Paul had to bring it up in this letter which he addressed to the entire church. Further, Paul is asking others in the church to help them reconcile.
 - Now turn back to chapter 2. Here in chapter 2 Paul is calling these Christians to live in unity with each other, to serve each other, to look to each others interests. **READ 1-2 - *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.***
- But right in the middle of this call to live out the true Christian life, Paul warns about something in our hearts that is always seeking to destroy true community and that is seeking to destroy us. It is Me-Ville.
 - Look at in verse 3. **READ 3 - *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.***
 - This verse shows us two things about Me-Ville.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** In Me-Ville each person lives for him or her self.
 - “Selfish ambition” means that what drives us is our own wants and desires. Everything is subordinate to self. When we do things out of conceit we are doing them in order that *we* might look good, in order that *we* might boast, in order that others might think well of *us*.
 - Paul is warning the Philippians and us of how powerful Me-Ville is in our hearts. That is his point so far.
- Now up until about 35 years ago all societies have recognized that people are self-absorbed and treated it as a bad thing. Part of the reason for this was that people needed each other just to survive. Society could not afford too much self-absorption. People had to work together just to get food on their tables.
 - Even in my grandparent's generation, living for yourself was frowned upon. You had a duty to live for God, for family, and even a duty lay your life down for your country.
 - In the past few decades though we have witnessed a radical shift in how the self is to be regarded. Let me track this change for you over the last few decades.

- In 2006 Dr. Jean Twenge, a social psychologist, published a book entitled *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – And More Miserable Than Ever Before*. This book is the result of 13 years of research on the responses of 1.3 million young people born from 1970-1990 which she calls, "Generation Me."
 - Dr. Twenge shows how children growing up in the 1970's grew up in a world shaken by two world wars, a holocaust, and Vietnam. A great concern for the emotional health of children led to a national commitment to train children in self-esteem.
 - Research on self-esteem exploded in the 1970's-1980's. Articles on the issue doubled during those two decades. Journal articles then increased another 52% in 1990 and the number of books doubled at the same time.
- Dr. Twenge writes, *"Generation Me has never known a world that put duty before self, and believes that the needs of the individual should come first. This is not the same thing as being selfish – it is captured, instead, in the phrases we so often hear: 'Be yourself,' 'Believe in yourself,' 'You must love yourself before you can love someone else.' These are some of our culture's most deeply entrenched beliefs, and Generation Me has grown up hearing them whispered in our ears...*
 - *We live in a time when high self-esteem is encouraged from childhood, when young people have more freedom and independence than ever, but also far more depression, anxiety, cynicism, and loneliness. Today's young people have been raised to aim for the stars at a time when it is more difficult than ever to get into college, find a good job, and afford a house. Their expectations are very high just as the world is becoming more competitive, so there's a huge clash between their expectations and reality. More than any other generation in history, the children of Baby Boomers are disappointed by what they find when they arrive at adulthood."*¹
- Now there is a certain amount of this education on self-esteem that is surely good. A child should never be told they were worthless. A child should be told they are special. But Dr. Twenge argues that all of this has gone further than we thought. In 2009 Dr. Twenge teamed up with Dr. Keith Campbell to release a book entitled, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living In The Age Of Entitlement*. This book chronicles the relentless rise of narcissism in our culture. They write,
 - *"Narcissism means having an inflated or grandiose sense of self. A narcissist thinks she is special, unique, and entitled to better treatment than others. Narcissists aren't particularly interested in warmth and caring in their relationships. They might enjoy being around people — and certainly can be charming, flattering, exciting and likable — but they are in relationships for their own narcissistic needs. Narcissists also spend a good deal of their time and energy doing things to make themselves look and feel good and pumping up their egos. A narcissist might brag, turn all conversations back to himself, try to associate only*

¹ <http://www.generationme.org/aboutbook.html>

with important people, want to have the best and newest of everything, or steal credit from others. When things don't go his way, the narcissist might get angry or even violent."²

- The authors are not arguing that everyone is clinically narcissistic but they are arguing that it is an epidemic in our society. Through their research they clearly show that compared to 50 and 75 years ago our entire culture has experienced a radical shift toward living for self.
 - You can track this in song lyrics. Way back in 1980 John Lennon was part of this. After he broke away from the *Beatles* he recorded his famous song entitled, "God." The chorus lists all the things he does not believe in. He sings, ***"I don't believe in Jesus...I don't believe in Elvis ...I don't believe in Beatles...I just believe in me."***
 - Fast forward to today. Living for myself and loving myself are key themes in music. Katy Perry tells us to be ***"be a firework, come on show them what you're worth."*** 19-year-old pop star Haley Steinfeld just released a song called *Love Myself* in which the chorus says, ***"(I love me) Gonna love myself, no, I don't need anybody else."***
- Jim Gaffigan, one of today's most famous comedians, uses humour to show how ridiculously self-obsessed we are. He talks about how when you work out at the gym the walls are covered in mirrors. Why? Gaffigan says,
 - ***"I want to look at myself while I work on myself. I should make a recording so I can listen to myself while I look at myself while I work on myself as I leaf through my Self magazine and read about how myself can improve myself. Maybe I'll go to my Facebook page and look at photos of myself and read what myself has written about myself."***³
- We can laugh at this but Me-Ville dominates all of us.
 - You can see your self-absorption when you avoid opportunities to serve because you just want to relax.
 - You can see how important self is when you are easily offended and hurt.
 - You can see it when you lash out in anger to defend yourself.
 - You can see it when you promote yourself and when you are always the hero of your own stories.
 - You see it when you look down on others because they are not as educated as you, as well versed in music as you, as wise as you, as kind as you, as gentle as you, or as good with people as you.
 - You can see it when someone else is talking and instead of listening you are only thinking of what you want to say.
 - You see it in how you so easily spend money on yourself but find it difficult to give away large sums of money.
 - You can see it in the bare fact that most of your thoughts are taken up with your self.

² <http://www.narcissismepidemic.com/aboutbook.html>

³ Jim Gaffigan, *Mr. Universe* (2012).

- So that is the first thing to say about the way of Me-Ville. In Me-Ville each person lives for self. But let me show you a second thing about the way of Me-Ville.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** In Me-Ville relationships fall apart.
 - This is precisely what was happening in Philippi. These women, motivated by selfish ambition, were fighting with each other. Their argument had become so large that it was affecting the whole community.
 - Self-centredness always does this. Another author describes this problem by saying, ***“every one has in himself the mind of a king, by claiming everything for himself.”***⁴ We all want to be kings and queens. But what happens when two queens want to rule the same castle? War.
- C.S. Lewis captures how our self-absorption destroys relationships in his book *The Great Divorce*. It’s a fictional account of hell. The main character of the book arrives in hell and finds a sprawling suburb of houses. In this hell people only have to imagine something and it exists. The only problem is that the houses are all empty. It is explained that when someone arrives to hell they move into a house. But they quickly have a quarrel with the neighbour and so they move away. This process keeps happening as they move further and further away from everyone.
 - The main character asks another man where those people are who arrived thousands of years ago. Here is the response: ***“They’ve been moving on and on. Getting further apart. They’re so far off by now...astronomical distances. There’s a bit of rising ground near where I live and a chap has a telescope. You can see the lights of the inhabited houses, where those old ones live, millions of miles away. Millions of miles from us and from one another.”***⁵
 - The man tells him about Napoleon who is one of the closer ones. ***“Two men went to see him. It took about fifteen thousand years to get to his house. When they got there they saw Napoleon pacing back and forth in his house always muttering to himself, “It was Soutl’s fault. It was Ney’s fault. It was Josephine’s fault. It was the fault of the Russians. It was the fault of the English.”***⁶
- You see when self is at the centre we are in conflict with others. We blame everyone else and we move away from them. How many relationships have you ruined because of self-centredness? How many relationships have been lost because of someone else’s self-centredness? How much strain is there in your immediate family or extended family?
 - Is it not because all of us are dominated by the city of Me-Ville? And yet despite all the pain it brings we seem stuck in Me-Ville. We can’t get out.
 - Ah, but this is where the message of Christmas comes in. The message of Christmas shows us a way of escape.

⁴ Quoted in John Calvin, *Philippians*, 53.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 19.

⁶ *Ibid.* 20-21.

THE WAY OUT OF ME-VILLE

- Now that we have looked at the way of Me-Ville, let's turn in the second place to look at **(SHOW SLIDE)** the way out of Me-Ville.
 - There are two things that need to be said here. We get out of Me-Ville first by receiving the story of Christmas and then second by going ever deeper into the story of Christmas.
- First, **(SHOW SLIDE)** to get out of Me-Ville we must receive the story of Christmas.
 - What is that story? Part of that message is that God became a man in order to deliver us from Me-Ville. Let me show you how Paul unfolds the Christmas story in verses 6-11.
- **READ 6a - *Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God.*** Jesus is in very nature God. He is not a created being as Jehovah's Witnesses say. He is not just a great prophet like Islam says. He is none other than God himself.
 - As God, Jesus possesses all the rights of God. He has the right to be treated as supreme, the right to be worshipped and adored, the right to have everyone serve him, and the right to exist only for himself.
 - But in the most astonishing turn of events in the history of the universe we read that Jesus did not hold on to those rights. We read in verse 6, **READ 6-7 - *Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.***
- Grasp the magnitude of what is being said here. This is God Almighty, the Holy One of Israel, the one who spoke and worlds leapt into existence. This same Jesus is the God who did sit, and now sits, on a throne surrounded by angels who cry out to him, ***"holy, holy holy, is the Lord God Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory."***
 - But we read that this King stepped off his throne. This does not mean he ceased to be God. It means that He chose to give up the rights and privileges of being God. He took off his kingly robe and put on human flesh. But he did not come to earth as a regal king demanding worship. He came as a helpless baby.
 - And then the text says that this King came as a servant. A servant does not live for self. A servant lives to serve others. Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. He used his days to serve other people. He healed sickness and diseases. He cared for people.
- The supreme way that he served us was to lay down his life for our sins. **READ 8 - *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*** He took all of your selfishness upon himself. He allowed himself to face the judgement that you deserve to face. This is the ultimate example of selflessness.
 - Because he humbled himself like this we read in verse 9. **READ 9-11 - *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should***

bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- So what does it mean to receive the story of Christmas?
 - It means you open the gates of your heart – the gates of Me-Ville. You fall to your knees before Jesus and say, *“I admit that I have ruled my own life. I confess that even though you created me I have put myself at the centre. I know I deserve judgement but Jesus I have heard that you came into this world not to destroy me but to deliver me. So here I am. Forgive me. Set up your rule in my heart. Please come and rescue me from Me-Ville.”*
 - So you see, becoming a Christian means giving up control of your life. It is removing self from the throne and bowing to a new king. Will you do this today?

GO DEEPER INTO THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS

- Once you become a Christian, God sets up his city in your heart. But here is the problem. We keep running back to Me-Ville. Like the women in Philippi we keep returning to our old ways.
 - But Jesus loves us too much to let this happen. He is on a relentless mission to tear down every brick in Me-Ville. He wants us to be free.
- The second thing we need to say about the way out of Me-Ville is that **(SHOW SLIDE)** we get out of Me-Ville by going deeper into the story of Christmas.
 - Is that not the entire point of this passage? Follow Paul’s logic. Paul wants us to live in unity and love that serves each other. But our hearts are selfish and filled with conceit. To get out of Me-Ville we have to keep developing the mind of Christ in us. We are to work at having the same attitude that Jesus had. That is what verses 5 says. **READ 5 - *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.*** So this is not a one-time thing. We are to keep coming back to the message of Christmas going ever deeper into it.
 - This is the way to tear down all the bricks in Me-Ville. This is the way to change your self-centred heart to a heart that loves to serve others.
- When you don’t feel like serving others or when you find yourself at odds with others, what you need is to remember again the message of Christmas. Look again and again at the attitude of your God. When you see Jesus giving up all his comfort and embracing being uncomfortable for you, it disintegrates your selfishness. When you see Jesus intentionally choosing to do the hardest thing of becoming a man to die for your sins, your selfishness crumbles and you want to do hard things for others. When you see Jesus using his power not for himself but to rescue you, you begin to want to use your power for the good of others.
 - But still your heart will want back to Me-Ville. Your heart will say, *“No, to be happy I need to guard myself, my time, and my money.”* But notice clearly with me in this passage that the reason God exalted Jesus was precisely because he humbled himself. Here again we see this principle

that the way to life is through death. The way up is down. The way to exaltation is through humility. The way to joy is through service.

- Brothers and sisters, the way for you to know true happiness and fulfillment is to lay down your life for others. To use your power to serve them. To look out for their interests.
- So let's get really practical. Where do you see self-centredness in your life? Take that area and reflect on how the message of Christmas should impact it. Then turn and serve others. What need are you aware of right now that you could meet for someone else? What is one practical thing you can do this week to serve another person?