

House Church Message Notes May 17th, 2020 – In Lockdown (8 Weeks in Philippians)

Week 5: Children of God in Lockdown (Philippians 2:12-30)

- **Introduction:**

- *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.* (Philippians 2:12-13).
- Remember where we've been so far in Philippians: Paul is writing this letter from imprisonment for the sake of the Gospel. He's writing to his beloved Christian family in Philippi to encourage them in their walk of faith in Christ, to thank them for their support while he is in prison and to give them updates about his situation.
- So far, he has offered prayers and encouragement for the faith they are already living out, and he has given challenges and exhortations for them to remember what it really means to follow Christ and serve this Gospel.
- Today's passage, Philippians 2:12-30, is part of this exhortation to live like Christ and live in unity with one another as the Body of Christ. It started in 1:27 with the challenge to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ" and everything that has followed has unfolded that challenge and what it really means to live for the Gospel.
- Last week we looked at Philippians 2:6-11 which is the key passage of the book; remember, it's a poem or hymn that describes in few but powerful words the nature of Christ and what He has done, coming from heaven to earth and laying down his life, now risen and reigning, exalted with the Name above every name. He is our example, our model, as well as our Savior and Lord. Reread Philippians 2:6-11 and remember that everything flows from this.
- So, today we continue to see what it means to live into this Good News together. Let's pick up where we left off.

- **Philippians 2:12-16a**

- V. 12-13 *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*
- Salvation is God's work from start to finish, it's a gift of grace. And that is *good news*. When Paul says to "work out your salvation" he's not saying that we must earn our own salvation by our efforts. Rather, he's contrasting his own work with the Philippians—the responsibility he would take if he was there—with the responsibility they must take to work this out in their own lives in his absence (whether he gets to return to them or not).
- It is *God's* work in us that brings about our salvation. But Christians have to take *ownership* and *responsibility* for their own walk of faith, to live it out daily.
- Can I be honest with you? In this time of lockdown, I feel a similar burden for you: as your pastor, *I can't be with you right now*. We can't be together. I don't know exactly how you're doing. But I want to say to you, whether we're present together or apart, you must continue to work out your salvation! Take ownership, take responsibility for your walk of faith. Do this with awe and wonder and fear and trembling before the majesty of the cross of Christ and all his power. But do this knowing that *God* is working in you.
- "...it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." God gives you the will and the energy to follow him. Isn't that an encouraging thought? How many of us need to hear that again today? Are you weary, are you trying too hard to perform and never measuring up? Let God do it. Receive all that you need from Him and He will do it.
- V. 14-16 *Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.*
- When is the last time you looked up at the stars?

- I loved Berenstain Bears books when I was a kid and my mom gave them to me to read to my kids now. They've been enjoying this book about the Berenstain Bears watching too much TV (those books were way ahead of their time!). Momma bear decides to make everyone, including Papa Bear, go without TV for a week so they can enjoy all the finer things of life together. The kids' favorite part of the book is when they skip the nightly TV special to go outside and watch the stars come out one by one. The picture shows them looking up in awe at the night sky full of those beautiful lights.
- There is so much awe and beauty to a clear night sky: picture those moments you looked up at that deep-navy-blue-blackness of outer space, spread out like a canvas and full of bright twinkling lights. It's just glorious, isn't it?
- So are we, Christians, to shine like stars in the sky in this world. To live holy lives of distinctness and beauty, goodness and service, hope and resurrection power—Christlikeness—in a world that only knows the way of darkness and death. As a small, peculiar community of people, we are to shine like stars in the sky in the place we inhabit.
- That might sound like a lot of pressure—and I guess it is—but for the point of the whole story: remember what we just read? Even as we “work out our salvation with fear and trembling...” it is “God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”
- **Philippians 2:16b-30**
 - V. 16b-18 *And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.*
 - Now the focus shifts from the Philippians to the life of Paul and two of his helpers, Timothy and Epaphroditus. All three serve as *examples* in some way of all that's just been described.
 - “Poured out like a drink offering” is a reference to dying a sacrificial death. Paul hopes he will be released, but even if he is to be poured out as a sacrifice for the service of the Church, as he is being taken to his death he is going to rejoice, he's going to say, “It was worth it! This is worth dying for! I give my life to this, I give my life to Jesus and His work!” And as he will rejoice even in death, they should rejoice too.
 - Paul is forward focused. He shows us by example, once again, how to navigate times like these, by dwelling not on what is in the past nor on the struggles of the present situation, but fixing our hope on what is to come. We are part of a much bigger story where Jesus is King and Jesus is returning to make everything new!
 - The most draining thing in life is not the energy it takes to do things, it's when you feel that what you do has no purpose—burnout isn't usually the necessarily expending too much energy, it's more like “blur-out” of your vision—losing focus of *the purpose of it all*.
 - If we're losing heart and losing energy to live for the Gospel, the answer isn't to try harder and do more. It's to regain our vision of Jesus. Go back to Philippians 2:6-11. It's Christ who motivates us, don't lose your focus.
 - Are we focusing on the problems? “It feels like this is going to last forever. Will we ever be free again? Does anything I'm doing right now matter? I'm feeling isolated, I'm feeling imprisoned, I'm feeling alone. What if the worst should happen...what if?”
 - Think of Paul's example: imprisoned, in-lockdown, his attention is forward-focused and upward-focused. He's not dwelling on what's wrong (although the struggles are very real, and he's not afraid to admit that), he's captivated by what's to come and dwelling on the reality of Christ.
 - V. 19-24 *I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.*

- What makes Timothy special? He genuinely cares about the body of Christ. And Paul equates this with looking to the interests of Christ. They are one and the same: serving the interests of Christ means serving His Body.
- *Everyone else is looking to their own interests, not those of Christ the Messiah.* Does this pierce you when you hear this? What are we really here for? What are we really doing this church thing for?
- I'm sorry to say that even on my best days, my motives are surely a mixture of my own interests and those of Christ. But I want to be true, and I need God's help. How about you? Why do you "come to church?" Is it to serve your own interests, or are you in it for Jesus? Are you ready to serve Him, and His people, rather than your own needs?
- We all need help with this, don't we? And so we come back to Christ: working out our salvation in fear and trembling, clinging to the energy and the will God provides, looking to Jesus and developing day by day in the "mindset of Christ, who, being in very nature God..." you know the rest by now...
- V. 25-30 *But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.*
- So, to be clear, Epaphroditus is the one the Philippians sent to Paul when they found out he was in prison, to bring their gift to him and to find out how he is doing. He was the one who was willing to make the journey. It's interesting to imagine Epaphroditus making the lengthy trip from his home in Philippi to Paul's place of imprisonment, and back again. He is the one that is going to deliver this letter to his home Church, and as this message is read about his actions, he will be standing there among them. Here is another real-life example of living for Christ. Here is a man who risked his very life for the work of Christ.
- N.T. Wright comments: "As for Epaphroditus: he, like Timothy, has followed the path laid down in verses 1-11. He, too, has been prepared to lay down his life for the gospel. He, too, is a visible reminder of Jesus the king, the Lord."
- And that is the beautiful thing about being the Church: through this work that God is doing in and through us, *you* are a visible reminder of Jesus the king to others, and you will be surrounded by others who are visible reminders to you of Jesus the Lord. This doesn't change in lockdown.
- It's easy to gloss over sections like this—it's so specific to the context, we don't know much about Timothy and even less about Epaphroditus (plus, his name is hard to pronounce), we probably want to move on to the more interesting stuff. But we know that every word of Scripture has a purpose—all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching and correction so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped (2 Timothy 3:16). And the truth is, these sections about Timothy and Epaphroditus have a lot to teach us about the nature of serving Christ and the nature of being the Church.
- We have a tendency to focus on the Paul's. Can I say that again? We have a tendency to focus on the Paul's. But none of this church thing works without the Timothy's and the Epaphroditus's. None of this happens without the *Philippians*.
- *It's not about Paul. It's not about Pastor David. It's not about miss Emily. The Church is the Bride of Christ. The Church is the Body of Christ.*
- *You* are the Body of Christ, and individually members of it. We need everyone to be *all in* if this is really going to work. Church, we need *you* to live this out and give all you've got to serve this Gospel. Jesus is worthy. Don't lose heart, take courage in who He is and His love for you. He has plans for us, even in this time. Let's do this *together*. Amen.