

A Faith That Works.
Philippians 2:12-15

Deuteronomy 32:1-9

Matthew 5: 3-16

Congregation: 1st John 17-21

Today we are going to continue our journey through the 2nd chapter of Philippians starting out in verse 12. But as usual, I think it is beneficial to go back and read the previous verses. I think it helps to remind us of last week, and helps to get the full context and meaning of the verses that we will be looking at. So let us start this morning by going back to verse 1 and reading through to what we will be looking at today.

I think when we are looking at our passage today it is key to remember these previous verses talking about Christ not counting himself equal to God, coming as a man, being humbled and obedient even to the most humiliating and cruel death of the cross. For this is exactly why we do what we do. It is why we gather together on Sunday to worship corporately. To instruct, encourage and if need be rebuke those who are in the family of God. It is also the reason why we share the gospel, why we minister even when it may not be the beneficial thing for us to do, but it is the right thing for us to do.

I think of people who are called into the missions field. The sacrifices that are made putting the ministry before family, before desires, and well before anything. No body really looks at that and thinks, Yeah, that sounds like a great idea! Lets suffer, lets not know if we are going to be able to buy any food this week, or possibly be thrown in prison leaving their families father, or motherless. It is a call, a desire only granted by God himself because no man would desire that life for himself.

Yet all of that being said, it is exactly what we are to do is it not? The bible is constantly pointing to the sacrifice that Christ made, and it is constantly instructing us to do likewise. To lay down our lives for each other, to not be concerned for ourselves but rather for the souls of those around us. This type of completely selfless love, and selfless action is quite impossible for us to achieve on our own. That does not mean we do not strive for it, but the reality is no matter how hard we try, no matter how hard we may even outwardly act like it, inside can spring up doubt, despair, fear, even anger and bitterness.

Thankfully, even though God commands absolute obedience, absolute love, which is something we can not obtain in this life we have Jesus Christ as our advocate, as our sacrifice covering our sins and our rebellion against the father. What we see Paul encouraging the church at Philippi to do is this very thing. To continue walking in the faith that they have been given, no matter what may arise, trusting in the Father, remembering that they are precious to him for his own Son died that they may be reconciled to him. And for us it is the same, we should take the same encouragement that is meant for the Philippian church and apply it to ourselves. If God loves you enough that he sent his only Son to die for you, why are you worried, why are you upset, do you not think that he will provide everything you need?

Upon this thought hangs our only real joy. Life is depressing and disappointing is it not? Nothing ever seems to go as we desire, there always seems to be some obstacle standing between where we are and where we want to be. We look at what is happening in the world around us, and even in the churches and if we dwell on that to much one could become depressed not seeing any hope, or joy in much of anything.

In reality, as a Christian there is some health to that mindset, it is a constant stark reminder that our hope is not in this world, it is not in our family, or our jobs, or even our church but it rests solely on our savior alone. When we see how empty the things of the world are, we focus more on Christ, and find our joy, comfort and peace in him.

If we can keep our focus on Christ, make him our reason, make him our purpose then I think our our lives become full of meaning. Each new day becomes a new challenge of not how do I accomplish or get what I want, not an exercise in selfish ambition and desires but rather it focuses our lives outside ourselves to seek what God wants for us. Once again I think of the book of Jonah.

Jonah was doing everything he wanted to do...he didn't want to do what God told him to do, so he thought he would run away, thought he would flee....well that did not really work out very well for him. He could have saved himself from a lot of suffering, and trial if he had just only been obedient in the first place. This little letter that Paul writes here is such an important reminder to us, that we must keep Christ first, that we should strive for harmony together and to love as Christ loves. Ultimately it is impossible for us to do on our own, but thankfully we have Christ and the holy spirit who supplies us with the grace that we need, reminding us of the grace that our father has shown to us, giving us the ability to show grace to others as we ought.

These first few verses here in the 2nd chapter, which continue a thought from the end of the 1st chapter are things that I need to be reminded of daily. Verse 29. “For you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but to suffer for his sake.” For you it has been granted, it is personal. This isn't because of his love for the church organization, or his love for a group of people, but it is for you, individually, and personally. Should this not be at the core of everything we do? We are called to be loving, why? because Christ first loved us, and it has been granted on our behalf to believe in Him. We are called to be a living sacrifice to God, why, because Christ was a sacrifice for us, and it has been granted on our behalf to believe in Him through the sacrifice.

For this very thing, because God has called us and granted us to be his children because of the obedience of Christ dying on the cross, is why Paul says what he says here in the beginning of the chapter. “If there is any consolation, or encouragement in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship in the spirit, if any affection and mercy it is only because of Christ and what he has done. I really want to drive this home today, this Christlike mindset does not come natural to us, and even those of us who have been washed in the blood of Christ, forgiven and have been made new creatures still have the staining effects of sin, and rebellion. Our pride, our self, our ego tends to get in the way quite often.

It is no secret, I can be a bit of a worrier at times, I get stressed out about things that I can not control. Or I even get worried about potential conflicts that may or may not even arise, yet Paul says here that Christ is our comfort, he is our consolation. I am always impressed by people who live their lives in seemingly strong robust faith. Stepping out doing things that our natural mind says is a bad idea, yet they do it knowing that God is faithful and will provide.

The example that is ever fresh in my mind is the Wood family. I got an opportunity to talk to them while they were here and I asked them why missions to unreached people, what caused you to make that decision, and drive you to that end. To put it simply, their answer was God. Josh said that he had always had a desire to being a church planter, and Jody said that she desired the mission field. They had planned to pursue those goals when their children grew up, when Josh had retired, yet it is apparent that was not God's plan for their life.

God orchestrated everything to bring them to where they are today, sure there have been times of doubt, but each step of the way they stepped out by faith, and God has directed their steps providing for them in wondrous and even at times miraculous ways. Christ is our consolation, he is our purpose, and our meaning. If only we can come to a point where this becomes our forethought, and not our afterthought.

We have touched on this theme already many times, but again we see it here when Paul exhorts his readers in verse 5. "Let this mind be in you which was also with Christ."

Then he goes on to explain how Christ came in the form of man, for the purpose of dying on the cross, paying the penalty for our sins for us. Having the mind of Christ is having a mind of sacrifice, a mind of ministry. Sometimes I feel like a broken record because week after week I stand here saying this very same thing.

But as we find, this life of sacrifice, or living for Christ, of having the mind of Christ, or putting others before ourselves is a theme that runs throughout the entire scripture. You can't read very far without running into it. And truly it is a mark of someone of true faith. Being mindful of others, being gracious and loving, and putting the needs of others above our own wants and desires is exactly what Christ calls us to do. That is what drives some to make great sacrifices for the ministry of God's word. Putting themselves and their comforts and desires aside to bring the gospel to unreached and lost people.

It is a genuine concern and love for these souls who are perishing without hope, I think it is doing this very thing that Paul says we are to do, to have the mind of Christ. Christ came and died for us so that we may be made alive, should we not also go and die to self, and proclaim to the world what Christ has done?

So picking up today where we left off last week, here in verse 12 Paul continues. Since Christ has come, and since he has been exalted and given a name above all names so that every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, verse 12. "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

One of the first things that stands out to me in this verse is how it can be taken completely out of context. See, it says here to work out your salvation, The Catholic church comes to mind here, and others who have a works based faith. Do good, so hopefully one day when judgment comes you will be found having done more good than bad so God will let you enter into heaven. But that is not at all what Paul is saying here, that is putting their own understanding upon this passage instead of taking meaning out of it.

Sure the Christian life takes work, we have just been talking about that work, Sacrifice, ministry, worship, these are all things that don't really come naturally to us but are things that we must strive for, work for, but it isn't that work that justifies us before God, that work is what we do because of Christ working in us to will and to do. We are not saved by works, but rather we are saved for works.

Ephesians 2:8-10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

It is important to distinguish the difference between putting forth effort to live out this christian life as we ought, or living life in a way that we believe that we can earn merit before God. This effort that we are to put forth, this striving to be like Christ, not because it is what saves us, but because we have been saved. Works it's way through us in 3 distinct ways that we see here in Philippians.

1st, we see in chapter 1, verse 5-7. “ For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. Just as it is right for me to think this of your all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.” What we find here is fellowship, working together. This faith is not entirely individual, but it is communal. Our work is to partner together in the gospel, to do that which God has called us to do whether it be the one who preaches, or to be the one who supports and encourages.

2nd this effort we are to put forth as Christians is found in verse 27. “ Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the gospel.” Again there is this encouragement to strive together, to be of one mind, to work together for the gospel. But not only that, he says that we should be living our life, having our conduct be worthy of that gospel that we preach. We must be careful to not be hypocrites, if we are preaching the love of Christ toward us, sharing the hope that we have in him, yet we do not show forth love, or hope our own lives, if our actions are not matching up to our words. And everyone knows that actions speak louder than words, people will believe what they see over what they hear. We are to act worthy of the gospel that we are preaching, let our actions, and our words be the same. As we are calling out for belief, our own lives need to show forth our own belief.

3rd we see in the first 4 verses of chapter 2. “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” We see here that the effort that we are to put forth as Christians is to love humbly and selflessly, just as Christ loves us.

Reading over this again something new popped out at me, verse 4 when Paul says, Let each of you look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interest of others. He isn't saying here that you should not have your own interests, but selfish desires, and your own interests are not the only things that matter. It is all part of living a life worthy of the Gospel, having the mind of Christ, humbly loving each other that one may put his own interests aside for a time for the benefit of another. From an early age we are taught to excel, to set goals for ourselves and let nothing stand in our way. “We can do anything we put our minds to” do not let anything stand in the way of your dreams. While that maybe the American way, that is not the Christian life.

I think that these 3 things here, is exactly what Paul is talking about in verse 12 that we should be working out our salvation in fear and trembling. But then that brings up the question what does he mean by fear and trembling. We see throughout scripture that we are to rest in Christ, or as we saw in 1st John that when the day of judgment comes we can be confident in Christ, but yet we see Paul here saying that we are to work out our salvation in fear and trembling.

I don't think that this fear that he is talking about is a fear of the judgment to come, but rather what he means is we are to live in reverence to our Lord and savior. Knowing that we are only saved from God's wrath because of his grace and mercy toward us. We need not fear him in the sense that he is going to judge us and find us unworthy, for we have the blood of Christ covering us, and because of that we are to be in complete reverence and respect toward him. We need to make sure that we understand our proper place, He is God, and we are man, his created being.

So we are to work out our faith, in reverence, in respect, of God. Verse 13 says, we are to do so “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure.” We are not working out our faith as something we do on our own, but rather it is God who is working in us giving us the desire to live according to his good pleasure. Just as I said earlier, we are not working to be saved, but rather we have been saved for good works.

Carson puts it this way, “these verses are not saying work to earn salvation because God has done his part. Neither is he saying, you have started salvation and you must complete it, and it certainly does not say let go and let God. It says that we are to work because God works, Since he is actively moving our desires and deeds for his good purpose, we should pursue them too. This is why we work out our salvation, this is why we strive and put forth effort in our Christian life, it is because God is working in us to will and to do.

That is why the book of James is so important, if a person is not striving for Christ, if their life does not reflect the God that they claim, if they are not walking worthy of the gospel they preach then they are liars, deceivers, and the truth is not in them. That may sound harsh and judgmental, but look at what Paul is saying, having the mind of Christ, striving together for the gospel, put aside self for the interest of others, if you claim Christ, yet do not live in such a way that your actions coincide with your words, then your words are false. For actions do speak louder than words.

This next verse here, verse 14.. I think we are just going to skip over...I kid because this verse affects every single person, and is probably one of the hardest things for us to accomplish. “Do all things without complaining and disputing.” That is a difficult one, for our human nature loves to complain. We take so much for granted, so when something doesn't go how we think it should go we complain, we grumble, and we argue that it isn't fair, or it isn't right. But in essence what are we doing when we grumble and complain? We forget that it is God who is orchestrating all of this for his good will and pleasure, and we, his created creatures cry and complain that it isn't fair, it isn't right. That isn't working out faith in fear and trembling, in reverence and respect, it is saying that we know what is best and it should be how we think it should be.

All of scripture is full of God's people suffering, suffering is a normal part of this Christian life, but our response should not be one of complaining as we saw with Israel in the wilderness, but we should understand that through all of these hardships and suffering God is at work to will and to do for his good pleasure. We can all look back at hardships in our life now that they have past, we can see how God has worked through them to bring us to where we are today. How God has used them to teach us patience, or reliance upon him, or how they may have opened up opportunities to be blessed by others, for others to show love, and mercy toward us.

Who are we to grumble, who are we to complain for the very thing we are complaining about, God has allowed in our lives for his purpose and plan for us. This is something I need to be reminded of often and daily, but not only myself, I think we can all say the same thing.

To do things without complaining and disputing is next to impossible for us, unless we have our hearts and minds focused on Christ, and everything becomes about Him, and not ourselves. When we are asked to sacrifice things, our time, our money, when we are inconvenienced for or by another brother or sister our hearts and minds should not be focused on our self, but rather on the needs of others, and to have patience and love toward them, not grumbling and complaining while giving of ourself to them because we would rather be doing something else, but rather rejoice that God has given the opportunity to be a blessing to that person.

We quickly forget verse 29 of chapter 1. “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for his sake.” While we may have been granted on his behalf to believe on him, to be freed from the slavery of Sin and death, we have not yet arrived at the promised land. We are still traveling through this fallen world. We will not have our best life now, our life will be marked with sacrifice and suffering, but in all of it remember that it is God who matters, it is his will and purpose, not ours, that matters, it is God who we are to worship, to respect, and to reverence, not only when life is good, but even more so when everything seems to be against us.

In the following verse we find why this is so important, why we should not be seen as those who complain, and argue. verse 15.” Do all things without complaining, and disputing that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”

Once again, actions speak louder than words, how can we who stand and claim a sovereign God who is control over all things complain when that sovereign God is working things for his purpose and plan? We are to shine as lights to the world, our faith that we hold is to be the faith that we live by. If we claim that God is sovereign over all, and we witness to the hope that is in us, yet we complain about each and everything thing that happens to us we are not living a life worthy of the gospel of grace and mercy that we are preaching. We are to be a light, a witness to this crooked and perverse world, let us not hide that light through our complaining and grumbling, but rather let it shine through as a witness to Christ who delivers, or grants mercy and grace. Let us be found faithful through trials, and hopeful through suffering so that when the world sees us, how we react to such things, they will be confused, and astonished that we can stand strong in our faith despite what may befall us.

I think of the witness of the Russian girl we read about a month ago, despite being beat, nearly to death on multiple occasions she still went and gathered, and worshiped with others. Despite her suffering, she worked out her salvation in fear and trembling of God, not of man, of respect and reverence of her savior, not of the government officials who repeatedly beat her. The result of that faith, was the conviction and faith of the very man who beat her. So who are we to complain when little things in life seem to not be going our way. Let us instead praise God for his provision, and his grace in all that he has granted us, let us instead have the mind of Christ, and instead of focusing on our suffering, or the trial, let us rejoice in our salvation, rejoice in God's grace, and be seeking his glory, and his will as we work out our salvation in fear and trembling.

May we stand as a light in this dark world, having our lives and our actions be a witness to the hope and salvation that we have. For that is what it is to be a Christian, that is what true faith looks like. Let us be found as people who have this kind of faith, ones who live life worthy of the gospel we preach. Let us be known as those who work out our salvation in fear and trembling, in love and respect, and reverence for our Father. Let us be striving together seeking the will of God in our lives and in our ministry. Doing all things for the praise, and glory of our heavenly father.