

Paul's Christ-like Example
Philippians 4:8-23

Congregation Deuteronomy 16:12-19

Matthew 6:19-34

Romans 15:1-13

(Read 1-10) So today I think we will be closing out our study here in Philippians. I am still not entirely sure where we are heading next week, but I am thinking of going through one of the gospels, probably either Mark or Luke as Aaron has suggested. I like the idea of working our way through one of these.

Last week we talked about Christian Meditation and the importance of keeping Christ foremost in our hearts and minds. Last week we looked at different examples of proper christian meditation throughout scripture, its different purposes and what exactly we are to meditate upon. I think it is important to define our terms again today just in case someone listening to this recording may think I am talking about something I am not.

Biblical meditation, is not the same type of meditation that is commonly associated with Eastern Religions, looking to gain some secret knowledge, or reach some higher plain of understanding. Nor is it spending time introspectively looking at our selves in an attempt become more holy. It is instead a focusing not on discovering something new but rather on that which is already revealed to us through God's word. The examples we have been given in scripture of doing so that we looked at last week show that this type of biblical meditation focuses on 3 main things. God himself, God's word, and God's work. Spending time contemplating these 3 things on a regular basis is something that should pretty much come natural to one of God's children.

Having a trust in all that God has provided for us each day, having thankfulness for that provision and all that he has given, and having hope for all that he will do are just some simple things that should always be on our hearts and minds. Making such things a priority in our thought life will have a profound effect on everything we do, and everything we have to deal with on a daily basis. I think in verse 4-9 here we see Paul's instruction, to borrow a phrase, on how to have your best life now. "Rejoice in the Lord in all things" this includes even when things are bad. "Be anxious for nothing" which we can accomplish by prayer and supplication. Do you trust God in everything? Then why are you anxious? Through prayer, the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will have the effect of guarding our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

So in Closing out this book today, I want to read from verse 4 to the end of the chapter. In verse 9 here Paul says that that which we have learned, received, heard and saw in him is what we should do. Paul is calling for his readers to imitate him, to be like him as he imitates and strives to be like Christ. This book of Philippians is full of examples of Paul imitating Christ and as we close out this book I think we should do a sort of review and summary.

So one of the first things that we see, is Paul's love and concern for his brethren. Chapter 1 verse 3 he says "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making requests for you all with joy." What was Paul rejoicing in? He was rejoicing in Christ's work in them, and in their ministry of the gospel. Verse 8, "For God is my witness, how greatly I love for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are

by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

If you notice that even his focus here is upon the glory and praise of God. His love for his brothers and sisters here is bound up in the love of Christ. Just as Christ loves the church so are we to love one another, being bound together, striving together for the gospel, encouraging and yes, rebuking each other when necessary all to the praise and Glory of God. As we read this morning in Romans, “For even Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” and later he says, “Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.” This fellowship, this bond that we have together in Christ is what defines true Christianity. As I have said in previous weeks, the reality of this concept of sacrificial Christian love toward each other is central and paramount to our faith. It is what we are called to be, it is what God works in us to do,

Second we see Paul in his striving toward perfection. Chapter 3, of Philippians, verse 10 “That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected, but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” Paul recognized that he by no means was perfect, but that did not stop him from striving to attain it. There was no let go and let God in Paul's belief system. He knew that this faith is hard work, and he often likened it to a race. Something that one must practice, one must prepare for, and one must strive for. Paul was always seeking to improve, to grow in grace and understanding of his Lord and savior, to ever be more like Christ.

Along with his striving toward perfection comes the 3rd example we can take from Paul. Being gospel driven, with a focus on being a witness to the lost. We see this in chapter 1, verse 12. “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” and over in chapter 2, verse 17. “Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.”

Here he is, looking at potentially dying because of what he believes, yet he sees it as an opportunity to be faithful and witness to all that God has put in his path. This isn't just evident here in his writing of this book, but it is evident everywhere he went. Paul was imprisoned, beaten, whipped, stoned, thrown out of cities. And in all this he praised God, and even though it was his ministry and witness that brought much of his suffering he continued, he strived forward, to the glory of his Lord and savior.

Which brings us to the final example we see here in Philippians, Paul's Joy in such suffering. Chapter 1, verse 15. some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill; The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only in that every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.” Even here, facing trial that could mean his death he rejoiced in the opportunity to witness for Christ and he rejoiced in others who were preaching Christ.

So the 4 things we see here in Paul that stand as an example for us, is his Love for the brethren, his striving for perfection, his gospel focused life and ministry, and rejoicing in God no matter his situation.

These are the things he has taught, that we have received and heard in him and that he instructs us to do. To strive to be Christ like in our love, in our life, and in our ministry

Moving on now to the last half of this final chapter, starting in verse 10. (Read 10-23) These finally verses are called by some "Paul's thank you note to the Philippians" Paul recalls the aid that he has received from the church at Philippi, he says that no one else would provide aid when he started his missionary journey except them. And as we see here in verse 15 and 16 that this was not a one time gift given, but it was a consistent support, even here while imprisoned they still sent him things according to his need.

This example we see here of Paul and this church I think stands much to the shame of our western idea of church and fellowship. How often have we seen it where there does not seem to be much dedication between the preacher and the congregation. Preachers come and go, taking better offers from other, maybe larger congregations, and congregants come and go from churches all the time. Or how our western churches look at missionaries. They seem to be less interested in the support of the ministry as they are to see a return on their investment, often times pulling support if they feel things are not going as they think that they should. We do not see that here, Paul was imprisoned, I think it would be safe to say that his ministry was not going as many would hope for today, yet Paul informs them that even so the gospel is spreading. We see a genuine love, a genuine concern for Paul as they continue to offer support to his needs while imprisoned.

The interesting thing to note here, is Paul's response to such gifts. While he is grateful, he says in verse 17, "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account." Even in this he has kept God in focus. He thanks God that not only for their care for him, but for his work in them for them to be willing to do so. Martin Luther famously said that in the life of a believer there must be 3 conversions. The mind, the heart and the wallet. As we have seen even here, when someone begins to separate themselves from a congregation the first thing that goes is their giving to that ministry. One of the commentaries I read this week said that statistics show that on average a church member gives 2.5% of their income to the churches ministries. And in 2002 Barna did a study and discovered that only 6% of those claiming to be born again Christians actually tithe.

We see here why such giving to the local body, and to missionaries is so important, Paul is not seeking their gift, but as he says in verse 17, he seeks the fruit that abounds to their account for their support of the spreading of the gospel. Faithful giving is not really about the money, it is about where your heart is in relationship to the ministry of the gospel. There are many ways that one can support the spreading of the gospel, money only being one of them, yet according to the Barna study it is obviously the hardest for many to part with. Yet Jesus said, Do not collect for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But collect for yourself treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

That is why Paul rejoices in the gift he was given, for it will go to the furtherance of the gospel and will be laid to the account of those who have given it. It shows their heart, it proves their faithfulness, they are storing up treasures in heaven by their giving.

CS Lewis wrote, "If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but rather too weak. We are half hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and ambitions when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he can not imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Lastly closing out this book we see Paul's contentment. Verse 13 here is one of the most used verses in scripture, and probably one of the most abused next to judge not lest you be judged. Verse 13." I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." We have those like Joel Osteen who see this passage as God's promise to grant us what we desire, giving us the ability to do whatever it is we put our mind to. Here is a quote of Osteen's handling of this passage. "Most people tend to magnify their limitations. They focus on their shortcomings. But scripture makes it plain; all things are possible to those who believe. That's right! It is possible to see your dreams fulfilled. It is possible to overcome that obstacle. It is possible to climb to new heights. It is possible to embrace your destiny. You may not know how it will all take place. You may not have a plan, but all you have to know is that if God said you can...you can!"

And apparently you can find out how to have this best life now just by buying and reading his book, or playing his board game which I recently acquired from a 2nd hand store teaching you the 7 steps to having a better life. I don't think having your best life now is what Paul had in mind while he wrote this chained to a Roman guard awaiting trial and possible execution. Interestingly enough what is translated as Things here in this verse is not actually in the Greek, A better interpretation of this verse would be. "I can do all this, through Christ who strengthens me." When we look at the context of what is happening to Paul, we can look at this verse and understand exactly what Paul is talking about here.

Paul is not saying that we need to trust that God will grant us our dreams, but rather when our dreams are shattered that he will give us the strength to endure. Let's juxtapose Osteen's understanding of this passage with that of Matt Chandler, who writes, "Do you see now how Philippians 4:13 is not about chasing your dreams, following your passion, pulling yourself up from your bootstraps, accomplishing anything you want with God's help? It is instead a testimony of those who have Christ and have found Him supremely valuable, joyous, and satisfying. In a life constantly marked by these extreme highs and lows, Paul has found the great constant security, the great centering hope is Jesus Christ himself."

In all of this, Paul is saying no matter what happens in all things he has learned to be content in all that God has given him, in times of feast, and in times of famine. And that even in this trial, even at this time he knows that he will endure for his strength to do so is from Christ. So this power we have been given is not a power to realize our dreams, or our potential, but rather it is a power that enables us to do what is necessary in serving God. Paul said in Ephesians, "The eyes of you understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

With such a powerful God as our father, who grants us and gives us all that we have, should we not be content in what he has given? So in closing here, we find that Paul's contentment is wrapped up in his understanding of God's sovereignty, and grace. We should find our contentment, and our desires

wrapped up in our savior, being content with that he has given. As Habakkuk 3-17 and 18 says. "Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and not cattle in the stalls, yet I will triumph in Yahweh; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation! Yahweh my Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like those of a deer and enables me to walk on mountain heights! In conclusion, in all of this we should imitate Paul, as he is imitating Christ.

To be of one mind, striving for the gospel, generous with what God has given us investing in the ministry of his word, content in all things and resting upon Christ who is our hope and our salvation. I will end with a quote from Blake White closing out his commentary on Philippians, he says. "Paul ends here with a final message of hope. The Philippians Christians were being persecuted by the Roman Empire. Paul himself was in a Roman prison, which is why he spoke about suffering, and why he called them to be counter-cultural, walking worthy, not of Rome, but of the gospel, and why he reminded them that their true citizenship was in Heaven. And yet, who sends their greetings? Those from Caesars household. The gospel was invading the empire, and Paul wanted them to draw encouragement from this to stay faithful. Jesus Wins! Therefore, we must resolve to dwell on the excellent things, to be generous for the kingdom, and to be content in the lord regardless of the circumstance, all for His glory!