

PHILIPPIANS



*A series of sermons on
Paul's 'epistle of joy' by
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Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 1

"Introduction To Philippians"

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Philippians 1:1-2

Philippians chapter 1 is our text, and I would encourage you please to familiarise yourself with this little book - it's only four chapters long. It would be good if you could read it as much as you possibly can, obviously not neglecting your own devotional reading, but as far as you can to just familiarise yourself with the truths and sentiments that Paul is bringing to the church at Philippi. Also 1 Corinthians as well, and do come along tomorrow evening as we'll be looking at a similar study, as it were, as we look at the introductory words of both of these epistles. Now often it's easy for us to scan over these words and think that they're unimportant and they're just a matter of convention as Paul is writing a letter, but that is wrong because within these words there are the keys to interpreting the whole epistle and indeed the theme of the epistles we have before us.

So let's read verses 1 and 2: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ". Now I want to read it for you from another version of the Scriptures which is, I believe, more accurate in these two verses. I want you to listen very, very carefully to the differences, look down at your own version and look at the differences in this version. This is how the Greek really bears out, it may look minute to you, but you'll see in a few moments later how it bears upon the whole meaning of this epistle. "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus", note the difference in the order - not 'Jesus Christ', but 'Christ Jesus'; and not just 'servants', but 'bondservants'. "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi", not 'of Philippi', but 'in Philippi', "including the overseers and deacons: grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ".

The letter to the Philippians is, and has been known, as the epistle of joy, or the letter of joy. Twenty centuries ago an itinerant tent maker by the name of Paul was tossed into prison for creating a public disturbance. As he's in prison in the city of Rome he takes it upon himself to use the time well and industriously, and he writes many epistles - several of which we have within the New Testament - to churches around the Mediterranean particularly, and Asia. He sits down and upon probably a dozen pieces of scratchy paper, he writes the letter to the Philippians. Few people would recognise who the Emperor of the day was when Paul was writing these words, it was Nero of course. I don't know whether you know this, but Nero the Great was a great author, a prolific author, but there is nothing whatsoever that remains of anything that Nero wrote. People don't really know anything about him, apart from historians, classicists, who study these things - but if you were to ask even a man in the street who Paul the apostle was, he would know probably all too well at least a few things about him, perhaps even his Damascus Road experience and his wonderful conversion. Indeed, the time has come, as T. R. Glover put it, when people call their dogs 'Nero' and their sons 'Paul'.

One of the important cities in the region which Paul was going to on his first missionary journey was the city of Philippi. We might wonder why Paul in particular went to Philippi, but as we analyse particularly the book of Acts we find out that Paul didn't just choose himself to go to Philippi. In fact, if you look at Acts, particularly chapter 16 and the chapters before it, you will find that Paul's intention was to go to a place called Bithynia. But we read that the Lord didn't want him to go there, in fact we read that the Spirit of Jesus stopped Paul entering Bithynia and led him to go to a place called Troas. When he was in Troas, asleep one night, God the Holy Spirit gave to him a vision. He saw a man standing before him, a Macedonian man, and that man was calling to Saul - Paul - 'Come over and help us, come over and help us'. In obedience that vision Paul and Silas, and Timothy and Luke, set sail to Macedonia, and from Macedonia they travelled into Philippi.

We read in the book of Acts that their stay in Philippi was quite short but it was very eventful. If you're familiar with the book of Acts, and I would encourage you that if you read the book of Acts you can get a lot of the context regarding the epistles of Paul that we have in the New Testament. But you'll be familiar with the fact that often, in his first missionary journeys, Paul always went to the synagogue in the town first. He went to the Jews first, he preached the gospel of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, to the Jews so that they would understand - and that was God's commendation through the great commission. But when they didn't hear him then he went to the Gentiles and preached the Gospel to them, but when he went into the town of Philippi things were a little bit different because there was no synagogue in Philippi, probably because there wasn't enough Jewish men to make or warrant a synagogue. But as Paul travelled outside the city, just outside the city gate, beside a river there was a group of some women, Jewish women some of whom were Gentile proselytes, Gentiles who wanted to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - and there they were at the side of the river, at a place, the Bible says, where prayer was wont to be made.

The reason they were probably outside the city of Philippi was because Jewish-Roman relationships were not very good at that time, and of course we know that they really never were good even between the Jews and the Greeks. The people in Philippi, the Romans and those who came from that particular town itself, just saw Paul the apostle and Christians in general as a sect of the Jews. They hated them just because they seemed to spawn out of Judaism. In Acts chapter 16 verses 22 to 21 we find that Paul cast a fortune-telling demon out of a young slave girl, and because of doing that the owners were so indignant and angry that they brought Paul and Silas before the city magistrates for causing an uproar in the town and for teaching traditions that these Roman people did not understand and were not their customs - but particularly they were levelling against them the accusation that 'these Jews' were stirring up trouble again.

Because of that Paul had to leave the city, and as he left the city he left behind him a diverse group of converts. If you cast your mind back and study particularly Acts 16 you will remember that there was a merchantwoman by the name of Lydia, a seller of purple, whose heart the Lord opened. Indeed we're led to believe that her whole household, whatever that means, were converted also. We know the famous story in Acts chapter 16 of the Philippian jailer, probably a Roman guard, and there he is as the earthquake happens to free Paul and Silas from the jail, he realises that his life is going to be taken from him because he was falling asleep there and these two people - as far as he was concerned - had escaped. He cried out: 'What must I do to be saved?', Paul said: 'Do thyself no harm, for we are all here! Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thine house' - and the jailer and the family were all converted. The slave girl that I've mentioned already, most likely was converted to Christ and added to the church in Philippi, and they probably all met - according to Acts 16 verse 40 - in Lydia's house, because she was a wealthy businesswoman she probably had the biggest house to meet in for the church of Jesus Christ there in Philippi.

So as this motley crew of young converts to Christ, in the city of Philippi, all from varied and different circumstances of life and backgrounds, and they are the first church in the whole of the European continent to come to Christ and be formed as the 'ecclesia', 'called out ones' from different backgrounds and circumstances - but all called together to the name of Christ, by the grace of God, to be a light in this dark place, to be salt in the earth, and to work together in the awful persecution that the church is facing at this time to the glory and name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the first Church in Europe, people converted from different backgrounds, different traditions, even different cultures. You would imagine that in the midst of persecution from outside there would have also been problems inside, and as Paul was calling for them to all work together for the cause of Christ you can imagine that the task was not easy. In fact, we know from this letter that the task was extremely difficult.

Look at chapter 2 of Philippians for a moment and verse 14, chapter 2 and verse 14, Paul tells them: 'Do all things without murmurings and disputings', without grumblings. Everything that you do, don't complain about it - which insinuates that they were complaining about the work they had to do for the Lord Jesus Christ. They

weren't working together well. If you go to chapter 4 and verse 2 we see there another insinuation: 'I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord'. There was contention, there was fighting between individuals, perhaps even factions in this little small church at Philippi. Yet Paul was calling them to come together and to work together for the call of Christ.

Now I want you to see this, for this is extremely important: Paul is in prison in his particular situation, and he is writing out of prison to these Philippians' circumstances of fighting within and tribulation and persecution from without, and he's telling them from his experience to rejoice in the Lord! You've got to feel the import of what that means: a prisoner for Jesus Christ is writing a letter to these people who are wrecked by factions, fightings and persecution from without, and he's telling them: 'Rejoice, again I say rejoice in the Lord'. That is why this epistle is called the epistle or the letter of joy. When I was studying this I thought of Louis Armstrong, you know the black jazz singer, his song that you often hear over the airwaves and on television: 'What a Wonderful World, What a Wonderful World'. But the world in which these Christians lived, and I would vouch to say the world in which you find yourself living, is not a wonderful world. It is a fallen world, we have the Bible to prove that to us, and we know it from our own experience even without the Bible that we live in a fallen world that is acquainted with despair, depression, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and a longing in most people for a general sense of lasting happiness that will not be fleeting, that will not disappear after one night or one day. For many people in this world long years are spent and invested in the pursuit of true meaningful happiness.

You can scan the bookshelves of even Christian bookshops, secular bookshops, and you'll see self-help books. You can go to hotels in our country and in our capital and you can hear motivational speakers about how to be successful in business, how to be successful in life. You can read in periodicals and magazines, in your daily newspaper advice columns that are all purporting to have the key to what true happiness really is. Yet for most people, many people at least, the door of happiness remains shut in their face - it's locked to them, and they still as yet have not found the key to true happiness. Why is that? Well, if you break up the meaning of the word 'happiness' it's 'hap-ness' - happenings, where your circumstances determine how you feel. You see, we cannot determine our circumstances, that is the problem with finding true happiness. We can't control our circumstances, and indeed it would seem it's the reverse: our circumstances often control us, and we feel ourselves cocooned into things that we cannot change - many people in the world call it 'fate'. Kay-sera-sera, whatever will be will be - maybe it's your job, maybe it's a relationship that you're in, maybe it's the house that you live in, maybe it's the church that you worship in - you're seeking for happiness in those things, but you just can't seem to find it. You feel perhaps a bit like Paul, you're imprisoned!

People like this normally move from one gap-filler to the next on the merry-go-round of life. Indulging in all sorts of pleasures, some legitimate and illegitimate, trying to gratify their self and their ego and number one - trying genuinely to feel happy, to feel satisfied, to feel that their life means something, that it fits into the whole circle of the universe in some important significant way. But like Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes, who went after that pursuit of happiness himself, everybody who follows down that yellow brick road finds that it never leads to that place, but rather they declare: 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity' - all!

So how do we find it? Is it there? Can it be found? If it can be found how do we get there? Well the first important elementary thing that we need to do today, before we enter into any of the rest of this epistle, is to show you and get into your mind the fact that there is a difference between happiness and joy. There is a difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is determined by our circumstances, and because it's determined by circumstances it's elusive, it's fleeting. It's like soap in our hands: one minute we think we've got it, and the next, when we go to grasp it, it escapes us, it disappears. Whereas joy, that is written about in this epistle and throughout the word of God, which is opposed to happiness, we find the word 96 times in the New Testament - the Greek word for 'rejoice'. Ninety six times, so that the whole import of Scripture is trying to encourage us and enthuse us to be a rejoicing, joyful people in the sight of God. It is expected of us! The noun 'joy', not the word 'rejoice', but the noun 'joy' is there another 59 times. We are to be a people who are joyous!

The two words, both the verb and the noun are found thirteen times in the epistle to the Philippians, and Paul is saying: 'You people, I'm writing to you from prison, you're imprisoned in your own circumstances: you've got problems in the church, and you've got persecution from outside the church - but I am commanding you on God's behalf to rejoice!'. Now that's hard. The theme of this epistle is, indeed, divine joy, but you're sitting there asking the question: 'How is this possible?'. Stuart Briscoe entitled a series on the book of Philippians: 'Happiness in Life's Happenings' - how can you have true joy in the midst of all circumstances that are going on around you?

Well, this is where we look at verses 1 and 2, because the primary concerns and themes that Paul has in this epistle, and indeed probably every epistle, if you examine these opening two phrases and sentences you will find that they are not meaningless pleasantries. It's not 'Dear John', or 'Yours Sincerely', just the way that people wrote letters in these days. We know from seeing other first century letters that Paul did use the normal convention when he was writing a letter, and that usually was simply writing the name of the writer first of all: 'Paul and Timothy', and after this there's some sort of a prayer or a wish for the person that you're writing to - so you also get the addressee and what you want for the addressee: health, or wealth, or happiness or whatever. As we look down at these first two verses we find that Paul follows that normal convention, but a careful reader and student of the word of God will look and see clearly that he diverges from the convention and he adds a couple of things to the introduction. Now I want you to see this, because this will bear out our whole sermon this morning, and indeed the whole theme and understanding of this book.

He is telling us, even in these first two verses, how you can know true joy from God. There are three important changes that I want you to see in these first two verses. The first is this: Paul doesn't just mention his name and Timothy, but he describes them as bondservants - bondservants. Now you would expect it to begin like this: 'Saint Paul to the Christians at Philippi', but rather we get 'Slave Paul to all the saints in Philippi'. That's the first thing I want you to note. The second thing is this: he doesn't refer merely to believers in Philippi, but he uses these terms specifically: 'All the saints together with the overseers and deacons'. So the letter's not addressed to just one or two individuals, but it's addressed to all the church. Although he recognises the leadership of the church, and he gives them their place, he wants them to know that this is a letter to all these special people who have been set apart by God and for God in the city of Philippi.

Now before we go to the third difference I want you to notice this, how different this is from many of Paul's other epistles - because if you go to the first and second verses of many of them, what he does right away is he lays down his authority. He lays down who he is, the qualifications that he has, 'the apostle Paul, made an apostle not of men but of God'. In some places he even goes into the experience of the Damascus Road where he was made a Christian, and made an apostle, and ordained of Christ to be the apostle to the Gentiles. But he doesn't do it here. He prefers rather to emphasise that he and Timothy are just nothing more than common slaves, bond slaves. Yet he's careful on the other hand not to recognise his own authority, but whose authority is he recognising? He's recognising the authority in the assembly: 'to the overseers and the deacons', so he's putting himself down and he's raising this church and its leadership up. Now why is he doing this? This is the key to joy, it's the key to the epistle of the Philippians, and I want you to get above everything else - you've got to get this today and right throughout the incoming weeks! The key is found in chapter 2 and verse 4: 'Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others'.

Why is this greeting constructed in this way? Because Paul, by example, even in the first couple of these words of the book, is trying to bring to the Philippians' and indeed our hearts by the Holy Spirit the fact that true joy is found when we don't look at ourselves and look to ourselves and find joy in ourselves, but when we show concern for others at the expense of ourselves. Do not merely look out of your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Get this, please get this: do you want to be joyous? Do you want to know the real, true, living supernatural spiritual joy of God deep down and overflowing in your soul? Well, you've got to learn to be humble! Humility is the key to joy.

Paul hopes this will happen, he wants them to stop murmuring and complaining, he wants Euodias and Syntyche to stop fighting. He wants humility between all the saints, he's not taking sides between the elders and between the members, he's not taking sides - maybe Euodias and Syntyche wanted him to take either side of their debate and their argument, but he didn't do it. He came in and he humbled himself, and he came before them and wrote this letter to all of them.

Then the third difference is found in the fact that Paul expands the traditional greetings in verse 2. This was normally given, it's a bit like 'Dear Sir' in our language, 'Hope all is well' or something like that, and in verse 2 he says: 'Grace to you'. Now the Roman and the Greek greeting was normally 'Greetings to you', but he changes it to 'Grace to you, and peace' - that's another change - 'from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ'. He changes 'greetings' to 'grace', he changes a simple sentiment of wanting happiness for the people to peace, which is the outflow of grace. Now why does he do it? Because again in verse 2 he's bringing to us the real theme of his epistle. He said on another occasion to the Corinthians, listen carefully and let it all slant together: 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor that we through his poverty might be made rich'. Do you see it? He's teaching them, he's instructing them that they need grace, and only through grace will they have the joy of peace. What is peace only the outcome of reconciliation through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ? Reconciliation between us and God, but also reconciliation between our brothers and sisters in Christ!

Oh, how Paul is teaching them. Someone has said, rightly so, that whatever Paul touches it turns into the Gospel. He touches this normal greeting of the day and it turns into the Gospel. He can't help it, because the Gospel is just welling up in his heart. But do you see how he's teaching them right at the very beginning, in two verses in the introduction of his letter, what the theme of everything is going to be - and we're going to unpack it in the weeks that lie ahead. But I want to unpack a few here that are found even in these two verses in the time that's left to us, and it's five things that I want you to note in these two verses.

The first: 'Paul and Timothy' - Paul and Timothy. Now here's how you'll know true joy, and we're breaking up this word 'humility' in a practical way that Paul is teaching them in these two verses. You will know true joy when you prepare selflessly for the future - get that. You will know true joy when you prepare selflessly for the future. Why did he mention Timothy? I believe one of the reasons why he mentioned Timothy was that he was preparing this church, and indeed other churches, to be under the authority of Timothy when Paul moved on. Timothy's the young man, Paul is the older man - youth and age are being yoked together in the service of God, and again he's showing how there's this unity, how there's this humility. He's not thinking: 'This whipper-snapper down here, I'm not going to mention him in my letter', but he unites together youth and age in the servants of God. As Jowett, the great preacher, said: 'It is the union of springtime and autumn, of enthusiasm and of experience, of impulse and of wisdom, of tender hope and quiet rich assurance'. We as a church, now mark this young people and older people or middle-aged people, or whatever you class yourself as - we will know joy as a church when we selflessly prepare for the future, and when there is selflessness between the young and the old.

Do you know why there are certain problems in some churches in our land today? It's because the young people want to rule the roost, and they want everything their way. That causes a problem because it ostracises older people who have different tastes and different needs and different wants in the congregation. But the converse of that is also another problem, where the young people are ostracised and it is the selfish needs and wants and tastes of older people that are always given the sway. But Paul says that there will be this joyous harmony and peace and unity when both of us, no matter whether we're young or old, sacrifice our own wants in the interest of others. Don't argue with me about it, it's all here in the book!

If you want to know that joy you've got to die to yourself. The first two words he's teaching them! Then look at the next word 'bondservants', this is the second thing, bondservants. This is what I want you to note here: when you give self-denying devotion to your Master, you will know the true joy of God deep down in your heart -

when you give self-denying devotion to your Master. 'Bondservants', the Greek word is 'doulos', it's a slave, it's someone who is owned by someone else, who has got no will of their own, who goes and does things and goes places in obedience to their master - their will is not their own. I believe it's an allusion to Exodus 21 where we read there of the servant who's given his emancipation and is allowed to go free, but he loves his master so much that he knows that he's better off with his master. He stays with his master, and his master puts him up against a post and puts an awl through his ear and pierces him, and he becomes a devotee - not of duty, but of love toward his master.

This is what Paul meant when he said in 1 Corinthians 7: 'For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman'. We are free, but we choose to be slaves for the Lord Jesus Christ: 'Likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant'. Praise God, we've been freed from the bondage of our sin, but never forget child of God that we are expected to have devotion, service and bondslave devotion, toward our Lord Jesus Christ - and until you have that selflessly you will not know the joy of God deep down in your heart. Do you see how he's teaching these people? You know, if you're a slave of your master, your master has to worry about your keep, about the roof over your head, the clothes on your back, and the food on your plate. What does he say in this epistle? Philippians chapter 4 verse 19: 'My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus'.

The third thing I want you to notice: 'Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus' - not as the Authorised says, but 'of Christ Jesus'. Now here's the thing I want you to note here: when you follow your Lord's humble example, you will know the joy of God deep down in your heart. Some of you men will already know this, it's elementary, but I want you to bear with me because many of the young people will not know this. There's a reason for this change in order in the name of Christ, Christ Jesus rather than Jesus Christ. 'Christ Jesus', when Christ comes first in the name it's speaking of Him as the Exalted One who emptied Himself. First of all 'Christ', 'Messiah', that's what He was in glory, that came first, the pre-existent One in heaven - but He emptied Himself, and He humbled Himself and came to earth as the Lord Jesus. Do you see it? So Paul, even in this name, is speaking of the condescension of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now whenever we read of Him as Jesus Christ it's talking about how He was despised and rejected of men. First of all, when He came to the earth, that's what happened - but He is Christ afterwards, when He's exalted, He is risen from the dead and He's given a name that is above every name in heaven. Do you see the difference? When it's 'Christ Jesus' it's speaking of how He was in glory, but He condescended and became humbled to the earth; when it speaks of 'Jesus Christ', it speaks of how on the earth He was despised, but one day He became exalted through His resurrection and ascension - and some day every knee will bow, and tongue confess that He is God.

'Christ Jesus' speaks of His grace, coming from heaven to earth. 'Jesus Christ' speaks of His glory, how the One who was despised and trodden of men is now exalted. Now why does Paul choose this order, 'Christ Jesus'? Because he wants these Philippians to follow their Lord's humble example. James, Peter, John and Jude usually mention Him as 'Jesus Christ', because they knew Him on the earth - but remember when Paul first got to know Him? He had been exalted, He was in heaven, and it was the heavenly Christ - that's why we find so many times in his epistles he speaks of 'Christ Jesus'. But what is perhaps the 'magna carta' of this whole epistle, the key to it all and the most beautiful passage in it all? It's chapter 2, let me read you it in this literal translation, listen:

'Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there's any consolation of love, if there's any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in the Spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit; but with humility of mind let each one of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped: But emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant', there's the word again, He is the Bondservant of all bondservants that we are to look to and we are to follow.

It's all becoming clear, isn't it? Well, let's move on: 'Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints' - all the saints. Now here's the next thing: when you dwell with brethren in unity you will know the joy of God deep down in your heart. What does the Psalmist say? I love this Psalm: 'How good and how blessed it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It's like the precious ointment upon the head that ran down upon the beard of Aaron, that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forever more' - where's the blessing commanded? When God's people lay aside their own selfish rights, and start loving one another! Putting others before yourself.

Do you know what the biggest threat to this little church was? It was disunity. Do you know what the biggest threat to the church of Jesus Christ in Ulster is? It's disunity. It baffles me you know, and I know I have my doctrines, and you have yours, and everybody has theirs - but I go into wee towns, I was even driving through one yesterday, and there must have been half-a-dozen churches! Now I know we have liberty of conscience, but it's getting ridiculous today! You think one thing different than another brother and you go off! Can I just tell you here that the reason why Paul directs everything towards the saints is this: because one mark of holiness, that's what saints mean, not somebody on a stained-glass window, but every child of God is a saint - but it means they're called to live holy lives. One of the greatest marks of living a holy life is unity with your brothers and sisters.

We have spawned a doctrine in this nation and in this land that separation is a mark of holiness - and it is, separation from the world and separation from false doctrine. I'm not talking about the fundamentals of the Gospel here, but what I am talking about is this: one of the greatest marks of holiness is unity with your brethren and sisters in Christ, and we've lost that somewhere. Leslie Flynn wrote a book called 'Great Church Fights' - must have been a long one! He penned this verse:

'Believe as I believe, no more, no less,
That I am right and no-one else, confess.
Feel as I feel, think as I think,
Eat as I eat, and drink as I drink.
Look as I look, do as I do,
Then I'll have fellowship with you'.

'Paul...to all the saints'. Well, finally, 'in Christ Jesus, who are in Philippi' - in Philippi, yet in Christ Jesus. You see the fifth thing that I want you to notice is: when you recognise your heavenly citizenship and your position you will know the joy of God deep down in your heart. Now that's just like a resume of the whole epistle, and it's only in the first two verses - but it really excites me! They're in two places at the one time: they're in Christ Jesus, yet at the same time in Philippi. What he's saying is: 'Christ is your source of life, yet Philippi is your sphere of life'. You're living in one place, but in another sense you're in a heavenly place - and that is how to survive life's circumstances, it's the secret of joy in the Christian life: to be in Christ when in Belfast, when in London, when in Los Angeles, when in Paris, when in Japan, when in the workplace, when in school. Wherever you are the secret of it all, of joy, is being in Christ and bringing Christ into those places, and changing those places through Christ.

You will know the joy of God when you abide in Christ. It's all summed up: joy comes in Christ, through humility, and through unity. That's what this epistle is about, and isn't it interesting that his own joy is unrelated to his circumstances? He's in prison, they're in troubles and persecution, but the contentment and the joy that he knows is the fact that even though he is locked up and they're in problems, he's confident that the grace and Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is advanced. Here's the real crux of the matter of his joy: he doesn't care that even his own inconvenience comes upon him, his own pain, he's beaten, he's downcast, he's put into prison, as

long as the Gospel of Jesus Christ goes forward! That's the key to joy, when you see people saved, the church built up, and Christians deepened no matter what it costs for you - that's joy.

As we enter into this epistle, as we finish our sermon this morning, can I quote Alec Mateer and what he says? I want this to be our sentiment: 'Why should the world heed our evangelism if it does not see in the church that Christ has solved the problems of isolation, alienation, division, which curse and blight its own life? This is what the world is waiting for today, as it did in Philippi in Paul's day. It waits for the sight of a people who have solved its problems through the reality of being in Christ, and whose lifestyle sets forth the old God-given morality with fresh loveliness as the holy likeness of Jesus is seen in them'. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

Father, there are those in this building at this moment who are going through very difficult days, those who feel imprisoned by happenings and circumstances. But we pray in the weeks that lie ahead, Father, that we will know the emancipation of the Spirit of God in our hearts as we realise that it is through the cross that we have life. Thank You for our Lord, and for how He humbled Himself. Father, help us to trod the path that He trod, that others may see Him and His humility in us. Help us to stop fighting for our own rights, what we want, but put the interests of others before the interests of ourselves. Help us all to render up our sword, that Thou shalt conqueror be. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 2

"A Pastor's Joy In His People - Part 1"

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by Pastor David Legge
Philippians 1:3-8

We began our study of the book of Philippians last week, and we spent a little bit of time just looking at verses 1 and 2 of Paul's salutation as he wrote to the church at Philippi. We're going to spend today looking at verses 3 through to 8, which is the part of thankfulness, a sort of prayer in the introduction to this letter. We saw last week that his salutation in verses 1 and 2 really bore out all the themes that you find right throughout the whole of this little book. We'll find today that as we look at verses 3 through to 8, that his prayer of thankfulness for these people also does the same. Just before we even enter into the depths of this book, Paul is wanting to outline very clearly to us what he wants to get across to these Philippian believers.

So let's read these verses together once more, verse 1: "Paul and Timothy, the bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are in Philippi, with the bishops", or overseers, "and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ".

The subject and title that I've given to this message today is: 'A Pastor's Joy in His People', a Pastor's joy in his people. Now Paul, in verses 1 and 2, changed the conventional salutation and introduction of a Roman-Greek letter into the gospel. We saw that he had this sort of 'midas gospel' touch, that everything he touched turned into the gospel. Exactly the same happens in verses 3 through to 8, as he comes to his prayer, which was often the conventional form in a letter - first of all they told us, in verse 1, who was writing the letter, who he was writing the letter to, and then there's a salutation in verse 2: 'Grace be unto you, and peace'. Then usually, in any Greco-Roman letter, there is this air of prayerfulness and thankfulness to God or to their gods for the health, and particularly here the salvation, of those who he was writing to.

He does exactly the same in his thankfulness, his prayer of thankfulness, he changes it into the gospel, and he tells them: 'I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, in every prayer of mine', verse 4, 'making requests with joy'. That is the key to this prayer of thankfulness, this is the epistle of joy - we saw that last Lord's day morning, but he's coming to these believers praying and thanking God for them, and he is able to do it with joy. He is showing a Pastor's joy in his people. I've no doubt about the fact that Paul was wanting to communicate to these believers, and affirm to them, the affection and the love and the devotion that he had toward them. But he's also trying to announce to them the themes of why he's writing this letter to them. We've seen already that the main theme of all of these four chapters is that the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ should be joyful.

We spent a bit of time last week analysing what that means, and what it does not mean. The joy of the Bible, the divine joy that God gives to us as a gift, primarily, of the Holy Spirit - we read that in the book of Galatians - is not the result of happenings in our life, it is not the normal happiness that people in the world are seeking after. It does not come through comfortable circumstances, but this joy is something that is deep-rooted in our lives, that is within us when the gospel is making progress, when we see people being saved, when we see the name of Jesus Christ being uplifted - no matter what the circumstances are that we're going through to get to that end, the goal and result of people being converted.

Let me show you why that is in this book. Verse 18 of the first chapter bears that out: 'What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice'. Now what was happening here was that there were false teachers going about preaching the gospel, a false gospel - but they were preaching Jesus Christ. In fact, I think the reason why they were doing it was: because Paul was in prison they thought that by doing this the Roman government would think that the Christianity was just booming, and Paul would get a hammering in prison because of it. But Paul, because his great goal in life and chief joy is to see the gospel advance, rejoices that the name of Christ is heard and preached at all! Even as he is in bonds in prison, perhaps getting beaten for these people preaching it outside, he is able to rejoice that Christ is preached at all.

In chapter 2 and verse 17 we see the same sentiment: 'Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all'. If I have to die through bringing you the faith, through bringing the gospel to the Gentiles, so be it - I will have no greater joy, because my joy does not come in life's fleeting circumstances, my joy comes in a deep-seated satisfaction of knowing that Christ's name is preached and people are being converted. So you see the difference between joy and happiness as people understand it today. Now from Paul was first visiting Philippi on his missionary journey, until he's actually writing this book that you have in your hand before you, there are ten years that have elapsed. During those ten years, if Paul was suffering when he met these Philippians, he is certainly suffering over these ten years.

If you turn with me for a moment to the book of 2 Corinthians and chapter 11 we read an enumeration of the sufferings of Paul the apostle, specifically in these ten years that have elapsed since he first visited the church at Philippi. Second Corinthians 11 verse 24, he says: 'Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one', most men couldn't survive once going through that. 'Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness'. You could go on and on and on, and there are various other passages within the New Testament that lineate for us the great suffering that the apostle Paul went through. So you don't take it with a pinch of salt when he says that: 'I rejoice through my sufferings'. This is real, and the suffering that the apostle Paul was going through, I would say, make our sufferings - some of them at least - pale into insignificance. Yet we, perhaps, don't experience the extent of the joy that Paul experienced being shed abroad in his heart.

When Paul was in Philippi, of course, the real theme of his message that he was preaching was the message of salvation. We can see through the book of the Acts, when Paul was in Philippi, that there was this joint theme of joy and suffering as he preached the gospel - the two were inextricably linked, they weren't separated. I'll give you one example, Acts 16: where is Paul? He's been beaten, and he's in stocks in the prison with Silas, and they are singing praises unto God at midnight - and what happened? The jailer gets saved, God comes miraculously, brings an earthquake, they're freed, the jailer is about to commit suicide - Paul says: 'Do thyself no harm!'. He says: 'What must I do to be saved?', and he preaches the gospel to him - but what I want you to see is that the gospel was going forward in Philippi with joy, joined to suffering.

That can be reflected in his prayer life, this is a prayer of course - verses 3 to 11, we'll look at the rest of them if we get time next week. It's a prayer, and this joy and suffering is reflected in it. But before we even look at that I want you to see first of all of the phenomenal prayer life of the apostle Paul. Let me ask you the question: if you were doing as many missionary journeys as the apostle, and then you were beaten and you went through all that we read in 2 Corinthians 11, and you're now in prison in Rome again, probably facing death although he didn't, but as far as he was concerned that was probably the end result - would you be rejoicing? Moreover, would you be praying? Yet Paul, in those ten years, with all the great calendar and diary dedications that he had

for all the various parts of the Gentile world, he says: 'I'm able to come before God, regularly, and bring your names before God in prayer'. To me that is phenomenal.

Verse 3: 'I thank my God upon every remembrance of you' - every time I remember you I shoot an arrow up to God for you! Verse 4: 'Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy' - this was constant prayer! It was always - that doesn't mean he was walking around all the time praying, I believe he was in the attitude of prayer all the time, as we all should be - but as much as he could, I think the sense is, he brought the specific names of these Philippian believers before God on a continual basis. It wasn't just constant, but it was individual. Verse 4 says: 'for you all'. Now this baffles me: either the apostle Paul had a photographic memory, which he probably did, or he had a massive prayer list - but one way or another he brought every name of these Philippians before God in prayer. He didn't come and say: 'Lord, bless the Philippians. Lord, bless the Ephesians, bless the Colossians, bless the Thessalonians'. He didn't do that, he could have done it, but he took their names and he brought them individually and their specific needs before God. More than praying for them, the amazing thing to me is he could thank God for them - every one of them!

Now here is where I see a pastor's joy in his people: he could thank God for every single member in the church at Philippi. Now many pastors, I reckon, would have difficulty - and I do not speak for myself! - thanking God for everybody in the flock! But what this tells me is that Paul majored, specifically in this epistle, on his personal relationship with the Philippians. People tell us today, and I think they're right, that personal relations is the key to almost everything in the world. You and I both know human nature, that people like to be thought about, don't they? People like to be remembered. They like to be remembered not with complaint, but with compliments, as Paul is doing here in this epistle. We hear a lot today about public relations, and we tend in the church to pooh-pooh it, and I know why we do that - because we're not into advertisement or anything like that, we're meant to be epistles written unto men, we're meant to be the advertisement! But public relations was important to Paul in this Philippian epistle, because the simple secret to any public relations that you look at is to remember the other people rather than yourself. That is the Christian ethic of public relations.

In other words, as we looked in the Sermon on the Mount, if you want people to like you, what do you need to do? Like other people. I hear people in the church say: 'Nobody ever talks to me', and they walk out as soon as the meeting is over and never say 'Boo' to anybody. If you want people to talk to you, talk to people. If you want people to like you, like other people. If you want people to be interested in you, you be interesting to other people, showing your interest in them. Now the more we look down this thanksgiving of Paul, we realise that this is different than any of the other epistles that Paul has ever written. This isn't a historical narrative of what went on in the church, it's not a philosophical treatise or tract, it's not even a doctrinal letter trying to iron out some heresies that were in the church - but more than any of his epistles, this is pastoral. This is a pastor, with the heart of a pastor, coming to his people and wanting to pray for them, thanking God for them and wanting to provide in prayer the great needs that they had as a people - their personal needs.

Now if we don't go any further in today's study, there's one thing that this teaches me and it's that there needs to be personal relationships in the church of Jesus Christ. If we are to minister to one another, if I am to minister to you - and don't forget that you have to minister to me, it's not all one way - there has to be personal relationships. We should build those relationships up, we should cultivate them, we should dig the roots of them deep, we should help them not hinder them. Let's move on because we've a lot to get through, because in verses 3 through to 8 there are five specific elements of Paul's Spirit engendered joy that was related to these believers.

The first is found in verse 3, let's look at it: 'I thank my God upon every remembrance of you'. Now here's the first thing, take it down, and if you don't bring pen and paper to these studies bring them from next week because you need to take these things down. Recollection of blessing brings joy, recollection of blessing brings joy. Now Paul, here again, as he did in verses 1 and 2, he's not thinking about himself, who's he thinking of? These other people, remembering other people rather than remembering his own needs. Now remember where

he is, he's awaiting trial in Rome. The likelihood is he's been beaten and he's going to face death. I'm sure that Paul the apostle, more than you or I, had many bad memories that he could have thought up there in that prison in Rome - but he didn't do it. We find that he was illegally arrested, he was beaten, he's placed in the stocks, he's humiliated before the people. We read in 2 Corinthians 11 about everything that he suffered, but through all of this Paul has joy because people are being converted. The jailer is converted, Lydia is converted, the demon possessed girl is converted - and all the recollection of these believers in Philippi, as he remembers them, as he prays for them, and as he thanks God for them, brings him a great source of joy.

That's a basic lesson: recollection can bring joy. We're taught never to rest on our laurels on past blessings, but you know it's a good exercise - especially when you're going through rough times and tough times - to count the blessings of the past. Paul says he gives thanks for them, verse 4: 'Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy', but he's giving thanks in verse 3 'upon every remembrance' of them. The Greek word for 'thanks' is 'eucharisto', it's the word you get 'the eucharist' from that some churches use for the Lord's Supper. All that it simply means in the Greek is 'thanksgiving', and what they're doing is giving thanks for the substitutionary death of Christ. But what Paul is giving thanks for here is for their faith, and for the joy that their faith brings to him.

You see, when you start to realise that the church at Philippi were the only church that supported the apostle Paul when he left Macedonia, you can understand why he had great joy in recollecting their memory. When you read that not only did they give to him in that circumstance, but when he was looking money for the church in Jerusalem they continued contributing generously. Then, as we looked further, we find that in the book of Corinthians it tells us that they were very poor, the Christians in Macedonia and Philippi were poor believers, but it was out of their poverty that they gave liberally, sacrificially. When Paul thinks about these things he begins to thank God for them, and it brings great joy to his heart.

The question I want you to ask yourself for my benefit and for the rest of our benefit is: am I the kind of Christian that brings joy to my pastor when he thinks of me? Are you? What do people think of when they think of you? 'That boy is a gurner, he's a moaner. She's a gripe, look at the face on her'. Is that the way people think of you? My friend, when Paul recollected these believers and prayed for them it brought him great joy. We ought to be trying to be people, not only that pray for others, and find joy in others, that don't look for the bad in others, not ignoring it but overlooking it in love - but we ought to be people who bring joy to others as they remember us!

Well, recollection of blessings brings joy, later on he says: 'I have you in my heart', but he could say here: 'I have you in my mind'. We'll find as we go through the book of Philippians how important the mind is. Although joy comes in the heart it is channelled through the mind, it comes from our attitudes to one another, it comes from our attitudes to work, to money, to possessions, to life in general and specifically to our Lord Jesus Christ. Our attitude affects our life, and joy will never get deep down into our heart unless it comes, first and foremost channelled through our mind.

Let's move on, verse 4: 'Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy'. Recollection of his blessings brought him joy, but intercession for others brings him joy. If you look at chapter 2 verse 4 that we looked at last week: 'Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others'. Another translation says: 'Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others'. Paul showed this in the greatest way that you can as a believer, in prayer! Remember the apostle is in great pain, he's in dire circumstances in prison, yet he still finds the time to praise God and to pray for the saints.

Now the converse of this is seen when people have a lack of joy, a deficit of joy in their life. You can tell right away. The first thing that you see is that they have not positive thoughts about other people but negative thoughts. It generally comes out of their heart through their mouth when they talk about other people, they've a

lack of joy. The second evidence of that is a lack of concern for other people's welfare, when they're looking after number one, they're not really concerned about other people. The third thing is a failure - and this is perhaps the greatest sin for the Christian - a failure to intercede for the people on their behalf. Have you a lack of joy in your heart that is manifest through gross selfishness, self-centredness, pride, often vengeance? What happens is that this self-centredness inevitably manifests itself in prayerlessness! Do you know that one of the greatest evidences of pride that you will find in a human being is the fact that they don't feel that they need any prayer? Paul, on many occasions, could come before all sorts of churches and ask them, plead with them: 'Pray for me! I need your prayer!'. Can I say to you today: I need your prayer on a daily basis, I need it! But you need others' prayer too. There is a pride - it comes, obviously, from our fallen nature - where our natural response to problems and circumstances that infiltrate our life is to bear it alone, go it alone. Stiff upper lip, stoicism, bear it like a man. We feel it's a sign of human weakness, maybe even spiritual weakness to share your needs with other people - do you know what Paul is saying here? God has ordained it that we as believers in the body of Christ should be channels of comfort to other believers to help them and to encourage them!

I know that believers generally maybe don't do this, but I also know that believers shut themselves up to the encouragement and the help and the prayer of other believers, and they go on a self-righteous road that says: 'All I need is the Lord'. Well, if all you need is the Lord, the Lord would never have placed you in a body called the church of Jesus Christ. I'm not underestimating the impact of Christ in your life and the fact that Christ is sufficient for every need that you have, but there are times when God has ordained that Christ should minister to your needs through His own body, the church - for we are His arms, we are His legs. At times when you put your arms around someone that is in great need, that hug can as much come from the depths of the bowels and affections of Jesus Christ as if He was standing before you.

He got great joy from recollecting the blessings that they brought him, and the intercession that he made before them. Thirdly verse 5, if you look at it, he thanks God for their fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now. Now that little word 'fellowship' has been translated in other versions as 'partnership', or 'sharing', and that is true because the broadest sense of this word means that they're working together proclaiming the great name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and people are being converted, and there's no greater joy than joining with other people in trying to bring people to the Lord Jesus Christ. But you know there's a deeper meaning, I believe, in this word. This was a consistent partnership and fellowship that is talked about here. He says: 'from the first day until now'. When we look at chapter 4 and verse 14 for a moment you see here that this gives us an enlightening as to what this fellowship really was: 'Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity'.

This fellowship is not just lip-service, this fellowship is not just ticking a particular doctrinal assent on a list of theological truths, this fellowship was not simply an agreement on the level of ideas and it wasn't even an attitude of sharing convictions with other people - but it was manifest in the life of Paul through the Philippians by actions! It was the actions that brought Paul great joy. We've got to get away from Christianity that is purely lip-service. We've got to get away from Christianity that is Sunday-go-to-meeting, suit-and-Bible. We've got to get away from it. We've got to move on to something that is from the heart, something that is rooted and grounded in action, that is a costly expression of our commitment to the Gospel. Paul is asking the question: how do I know, why can I have great joy in these Philippians? How do I know that the Gospel is being furthered from their hand? Simply because they are giving up all that they have for the Gospel! It's costing them, and I know that through the price that they are paying the Gospel is going forward, Jesus Christ is being glorified, and sinners are being converted. Participation in the service of the Gospel brought him great joy.

We saw last week in verses 1 and 2 that unity is the sign of holiness, not divisiveness. We'll see it again tomorrow night, unity is the sign of holiness - and if the church at Corinth, we'll see tomorrow night, could be

united and Paul exhorts them to be united, any church can be united. Not only is unity a sign of holiness and sanctity, but the principle of sacrificial giving to the work of God and to the furtherance of the Gospel is a sign of holiness. Now we're getting a checklist here of a holy life, and I'm not sure which of those two I can really tick - already, and we're only in two weeks of this study! Unity and sacrificial giving.

How do we give sacrificially to see that the Gospel is advanced? I'm not talking about giving, I'm talking about giving sacrificially. Let me, as I close, give you one example of it. The book of the Acts chapter 16, turn to it with me, Acts 16. Here we are in Philippi, and Lydia - the Lord has opened her heart and allowed her to receive the Gospel - verse 14: 'And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul'. Now watch the proof of her reception of salvation: 'And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us'. Paul had seen, in Philippi, believers who were willing to open their home to the Gospel, to put food on the table for the Gospel, to put petrol in the car for the Gospel, to put money in the box for the Gospel.

Do you know the greatest judge of how a church is evangelising? Look at the budget: how much do we spend on it? Oh, it brought him joy that they laid their lives down for him and for the furtherance of the Gospel. It brought him joy that he was interceding for them, and it brought him joy that he remembered their goodness toward him. We can have that joy too, next week we'll look at the other verses in this section, how he was brought further joy from these Philippians.

Father, we feel so inadequate when it comes to the aspect of unity and, Lord, the aspect of humility. When we need a centre of reference and a point of gravity, Lord, where else can we look but to the Lord Jesus Christ who, we in later days will have revealed to us in Philippians 2 by Thy Spirit, made Himself of no reputation, but emptied Himself, took upon Him the form of a servant, was found in fashion as a man, and humbled Himself, was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Lord, as we relate to our brothers and sisters in Christ, as we relate to a dying and fallen world around, may this mind be in us that was also in Christ Jesus, in whose precious name we pray. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 3

"A Pastor's Joy In His People - Part 2"

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by Pastor David Legge
Philippians 1:3-11

Now we're turning in our Bibles to Philippians chapter 1. You'll remember that last Sunday morning we began a study that we thought might take us just through Sunday morning, but it has taken us into the next Sunday morning: 'A Pastor's Joy in His People'. Really the introductory verses of the book of Philippians in chapter 1, where Paul is outlining his prayer and his desire, and specifically his joy in the people of God in the little town of Philippi.

We'll begin reading at verse 1: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels", or the affections, "of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God".

Now we saw both in our studies in Philippians and in the book of 1 Corinthians, how Paul often in his letters changes the conventional address and introduction of Greek and Roman letters into something that preaches and testifies the gospel, and we see that he does that again in the book of Philippians. Not only does he give us the gospel in his introduction, but he gives us a delineation of the themes that he wants to deal with in his book. He does that as he tells these Philippians in verse 4 that he prays for them in all of his prayers with great joy. Right throughout this introduction Paul gives these people an affirmation of the great joy that he has in fellowshiping with these people in Philippi. But he's not only doing that for us, he's outlining for us the great theme of how important it is for every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ to have joy within their lives. He tells us what that joy is and what that joy is not; that that joy is not the passing happiness that the world seeks after and longs for, that comes through circumstances and through 'happness' that comes into our lives, where our happiness is regulated by our circumstances, by our pleasures, by our feelings and our emotions - but rather divine joy, the happiness and the joy that God talks about, is something that transcends earth's circumstances. It is not the result of being comfortable, but that deep transcendent joy can be known right in the middle of earth's most darkest and difficult scenes.

In fact we know from looking in the background of the church at Philippi that their joy was born in the midst of suffering and sorrow. But in verses 3 through to 8 Paul gives us five specific elements of the Spirit-engendered joy that he knew because of the Philippians, and that they too could know if they focussed their mind on the things that Paul had his focus upon. Three of the things that we looked at last week, why this Pastor had great joy in his people, was first of all in verse 3: 'I thank my God upon every remembrance of you'. He brought joy to his own heart when he recollected the blessings that these believers brought to him. We asked the question of ourselves collectively and individually: when others think of us does it bring them great joy? Am I the kind of Christian that brings joy to my Pastor's mind when he thinks of me? But Paul could say: 'I have you in my mind'.

We spent a little bit of time, we don't want to go into it all today, about how important in the book of Philippians, but indeed in our Christian walk and pilgrimage, our attitude is to the experience of joy that we will know within our heart. The common denominator, the difference if you like, between down-in-the-dump Christians and joyful Christians right in the middle of life's most difficult sorrows is the attitude which we come to life's difficulties with. The second reason why he had great joy was because of the intercession that he had on behalf of others, we find that in verse 4: 'Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request'. They prayed for Paul and Paul prayed for them always, a constant continual intercession. We saw that it wasn't just a general praying: 'Lord, bless the Philippians', but it was specific. He was asking for them by name that God would bless them, he was bringing before God the specific needs that they had.

We took out of that a principle that self-centredness within believers, selfishness that is never ever a sign of joy, for joy is seen in selflessness when we live for other people and when we lay down our lives as intercession for other people - but self-centredness is primarily seen in prayerlessness. If you don't pray for other people it's because you don't care for other people, but Paul prayed for them and it brought him great joy to do that. Last week in verse 5 we read these words, he thanks God also for the joy that he had brought to his heart through the fellowship that he had with these people in the gospel from the first day until now. Participation in the service of the gospel brought Paul great joy. Broadly speaking as he shared the gospel, as he took the gospel to the Macedonian world with the Philippians and by himself in the beginning, bringing even them to Christ, it brought him great joy.

We saw in chapter 4 specifically that this was a joy and a participation in the service of the gospel that was not just through preaching, but it was practical. He was helped by these Philippians believers sacrificially as they gave the few resources financially that they had over to the furtherance of the gospel and to the help of the apostle Paul. We saw Lydia in Acts 16, how she right at the moment of conversion opened up her home in hospitality for the gospel to be preached. We asked the question of ourselves last Sunday: what do we sacrifice? How do we join with Paul in this type of fellowship in the gospel?

I hope we haven't lost all those things, but we want to carry on with two more aspects that brought this Pastor joy in his people. The fourth aspect is found in verse 6: 'Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ'. Anticipation of the believer's perfection brought Paul great joy. Anticipation of their perfection brought him great joy. How encouraging this is for us all when we find ourselves just launched into a very difficult circumstance, even with regard to things that we would have to call sins and iniquities, when life's uncertainties come along, when we find that we're doing well in our Christian life and all of a sudden we trip up and we're defeated, we're downcast, temptation enters into our life, and it seems that it's irresistible and every time it comes to us we fall down before it. Well Paul is coming to these believers who are in persecution, who are facing the temptation of denying Christ Jesus every day of their life, and Paul brings in the great assurance and the joy that can be theirs, that one day in Christ they will be perfect.

You see, salvation is wholly God's work, and we must believe that. Salvation is planned by God, and salvation is executed by God through His Holy Spirit in our lives. Because the Bible teaches that and we believe that, we must also believe that the completion of our salvation is also God's responsibility, and we can be as certain about the completion as we are certain about its inauguration. In fact, Paul is saying here in verse 6 that we can be as certain about the completion of our salvation as if it was already accomplished! Isn't that tremendous? Let me show you the word that Paul uses in this verse where he talks about God having begun a good work, it's also found in only one other place in the New Testament, in Galatians. If you turn to Galatians chapter 3 and verse 3, remember the Galatians were struggling with working for their salvation, even after God had saved them by grace, they were trying to keep their salvation by works. Paul says in verse 3 of chapter 3: 'Are ye so foolish? Having begun', and there is that word, 'having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?'.

The word literally, here and in Philippians, means 'inaugurated', 'to inaugurate'. He says to the Galatians: 'Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit are you now going to be made perfect by the flesh?'. The tense 'to inaugurate', it's employed as a decisive tense, as a deliberate act. In other words, because God at some time in your history has deliberately and completely saved you, do you think that you're going to accomplish it and complete it and perfect it by your own efforts? No! The God who has begun that work, the God who has inaugurated that work, will bring your salvation to completion - and hallelujah, glory to God, one day will present every one of you dirty, filthy, rotten sinners before God perfect!

I hope that thrills your heart - sometimes I wonder! I hope it does! You know, as Paul came before the Philippians his whole message was salvation, wasn't it? We see that specifically as he comes to the Philippian jailer in Acts chapter 16 - that's all he ever preached! We're seeing on Monday nights in 1 Corinthians that even when there was a dispute over baptism he said: 'I didn't come to baptise you, I came to preach the gospel'. What did he say to that Philippians jailer? 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt' - finished! - 'be saved'. Now I have no doubt in my mind when Paul came to that riverside to that lady, the seller of purple, Lydia, that he said to her too: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved'. We don't have a record of it, but I'm sure that Lydia had a date and a time for her conversion, and I'm sure that Paul gave her the gospel so that she could respond to it. But I want you to note that in Acts chapter 16 where her testimony is given to us, there's no mention of the gospel that was preached to her, it just tells us that the Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul. Oh, of course she heard the gospel, and she had to act in faith in response to the gospel, but it's almost as if Lydia is an illustration to the people in Philippi: 'Look, don't you ever forget that this salvation was never begun by you! It was inaugurated by God, by His Holy Spirit in your heart, when He opened your heart. And if you're sure that God has opened your heart, you can be sure that God will perfect your heart!'

This Lydia's story is the inner story of every conversion: God opening our heart. But what happens when you go through difficulties, when you go through temptations and trials, you get your focus back on yourself, isn't that right? You start to focus on your problems, on your imperfections, even if you don't see any in yourself - and this is usually why people do look to other people, because they don't see enough in themselves to occupy themselves, so they have to start sorting everybody else out - but they still see problems in other people and imperfections. We get taken up with these things, and what happens to us? We are dragged down, we're discouraged, we become dejected because of the lack of our perfection and progression in the life of faith - but if we could get hold of what Paul wants these believers to get hold of, the anticipation of our perfection in Christ that brings great joy to every believer that focuses upon it, it will send all the doubts to hell! It will foster triumphant joy, certainty, assurance, anticipation of perfection within our hearts!

Now I know there's a lot of you people here today and you need to be set free to rejoice more abundantly in your great salvation - but you've got your focus off your Saviour! You've got your focus off the great salvation that He has begun in your life, and you've got your focus on your own failure, and that's why you've no joy! Isn't it wonderful to know today that what God has begun in your life, unless He's a liar, unless He's a cheat, unless He hasn't the power to do it or His word is worth nothing, He will perfect it? F.B. Meyer said: 'We go into the artist's studio and find there unfinished pictures covering large canvases and suggesting great designs, but they have been left unfinished. Either because the genius was not competent to complete the work or because paralysis laid the hand low in death, but as we go into God's great workshop we find nothing that bears the mark of haste, or insufficiency of power to finish, and we are sure that the work which His grace has begun, the arm of His strength will complete'.

His arm is not short that it cannot save, His hand is not laid low in paralysis of death that He cannot perfect your salvation, and what a wonderful thing it is to know as the children of God today that those of us who are truly born of the Spirit of God from above, they will never be left an unfinished work! He leaves no unfinished

symphonies, but the great assurance of the gospel is that what our God starts He finishes! Does that not bring you confidence? The confident assurance not only of God's initiative in our salvation, but if I can call it God's 'finitiative', that He's going to bring it all together - why? Because we look unto Jesus, not unto ourselves, unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross - do you think He would have endured the cross if He thought He couldn't finish the work there and then? Not only did He think He had finished it, He knew He had finished it because He said: 'Finished'.

My time runs out on a regular basis, people will know that, and it's running out again - but it has to run out this morning, because if there's anybody here today: God help you if you're relying on yourself for salvation. God help you if you're relying on a church, or a creed, or your own morality, or your own prayers, or your own understanding of the word of God. And can I say this to you believers: God help you if God has begun a work in you by His Spirit, inaugurated it, but you're trying to carry it on by your own steam! He'll finish the work for you too, but like all the rest of us it will be in grace that He'll do it.

Well, He inaugurated it, this verse says that He undertakes to complete it, to continue it, He will bring it to completion. The verb is in the intensive form, and it means a continuous sense, He's going to keep on doing this, keep on building you up on and on. It literally could be translated: 'He will evermore be putting the finishing touch to it'. Isn't that lovely? I love that children's chorus, I quoted it to somebody this week: 'He's still working on me, to make me what I ought to be' - I love this - 'It took Him just a week to make the moon and the stars, the sun and the earth, and Jupiter and Mars. How loving and patient He must be, for He's still working on me!'

He inaugurates it, He continues it, and what a blessing today for you child: the outcome is guaranteed - do you know why? Because God's working to a schedule, do you know that? He is working to the day of Christ Jesus, that's not the day when you're up to it, or the day when you get to the standard where He can say that you're perfect, or you've got such a foundation that I can build on your perfection and make you perfect, and finish off the job - no! He has already a day on His calendar marked when He's going to make you perfect! The day of Christ Jesus fixed in the Father's diary, and if I can say it: God is under contract by His own word to finish that work that He has begun in you. Everything and everyone will be ready in time for that day. There'll be no rush, there'll be no last-minute haste, there'll be no botching up of the job at the end, there will be nothing that God will stand back and say: 'Ach, that'll do for now, that'll do in the meantime' - no! Everything, all things in Christ will be perfect!

William Hendrickson put it like this: 'God is not like men, men conduct experiments, but God carries out a plan. God never does anything by halves'. Child of God going through difficulties and temptations and trials, feeling you're not good enough, weighed down by your own guilt and your own sin, listen to this verse: 'One day we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is', because believers are predestined to become conformed to the image of God's Son - a time of perfection, a time of glorification that is in the diary of God.

Let me finish, my time is gone, but let me finish with this story. An artist on one occasion conceived in his mind a great picture, a great work of art. He mustered up all the artistic ability and gift that he had within him into one full sweep of art, the best and his masterpiece within his life. He was working one day on his great canvas putting in dribs in greys and drabs of other colours to compose the background of that painting, when a friend entered unnoticed to him. The artist worked away with enthusiasm and with zeal, not aware that his friend was looking on. Finally, happening to turn round, he saw him and exclaimed: 'What do you think of this? I intend it to be my greatest work, the greatest work that I have ever done'. His friend burst into a laugh and exclaimed: 'Well, to be frank I don't think much of it. It seems to me only like a big great blob'. 'Ah', replied the artist, 'you cannot see what's going to be there, but I can'.

People may look at you, you may look at yourself, and see a great blob of sinfulness - but God the great sculptor and artist looks down at your piece of granite hardness, and He sees within you a work of art, and His promise

is this: one day He will bring it out perfectly. Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Let's bow our heads, maybe you're here today as a child of God and the old accuser has been doing his work, reminding you of sins that you've done in the past, sins that you're still falling into. Well, I don't want to make you comfortable in sin, and that was not Paul's intention - flee from that sin, put it away and repent of it, for that is primary proof that you're a child of God. But if you are truly His, what a joy, what a joy to anticipate: that one day, whether through hell or high water, He will make you perfect and complete in Christ. Will you lay hold upon that? Stop looking to yourself, fix your eyes on Jesus the Author and Finisher of your faith.

Father, we thank Thee for the assurance of salvation in Christ. We thank Thee to know that we are eternally secure, that Christ has said unto us: 'I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish'. Father, this is not a cushion for us to relax upon, a bed of ease and sinfulness to backslide in, but it is a pillow to lay our weary sin-sick heads. We sang already this morning: 'I heard the voice of Jesus say, 'Come unto Me and rest'', Father, may weary hearts, backslidden hearts, even unsaved hearts, hear the Lord Jesus say to them today: 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 4

"A Pastor's Joy In His People - Part 3"

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Philippians 1:3-11

Now we're turning for our reading to the epistle to the Philippians, Paul's epistle to the Philippians, and chapter 1. Several weeks ago I found myself in the study longer than usual, and that's saying something because I'm in it most of the week, but for some reason I couldn't understand why I wasn't getting through the study - and now I know, because this is still the first sermon on the book of Philippians that we were meant to have three weeks ago! It has been split into three sermons because there's so much in it really, because Paul is giving us, in his introductory verses of this epistle, all of the themes that he wants to bring out of this book to the Philippians. We've been taking our time going over it as an introduction, and our title has been 'A Pastor's Joy in His People', and this is the third part of that.

Let's read the first 11 or so verses, beginning at verse 3: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God".

Paul says in verses 3 and 4 that he prays for these Philippians in every prayer of his making mention, specific mention, of each of them and all of their needs, with joy. Of course, we know that this epistle has been entitled by many people as 'The Epistle of Joy' - joy being not the result of certain happenings and circumstances that come into our lives that bring us happiness for a season, but joy which is something that is spiritual, something that is engendered by God's Holy Spirit and transcends even the darkest and most sorrowful circumstances that can enter into all of our lives. It is progress through suffering, not to be translated out of life's difficulties, but to know that as we go through life difficulties there is the personal presence of God Almighty through them in us and with us.

Of course, we've learnt in this introduction that there are five elements of God's Spirit-engendered joy that relates to us, and relates to us as how we relate to other believers. In verse 3 we saw that that joy is brought to us as we recollect the blessings that others bring into our lives. He says: 'I have you in my mind, I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. When I even think of you as my friends and my beloved brothers and sisters in Philippi, it brings me great joy to have you in my mind'. Then we look at verse 4, he says that he makes mention of them always in prayer, and we see that his joy comes to him because he has intercession for others. We saw that one mark of self-centredness inevitably manifests itself in prayerlessness - when you only think of yourself you only pray for yourself, and when you only pray for yourself you never think of others or pray for others, but one thing that marked Paul's joy was that he was selfless, especially in his intercession for others, and that brought him great joy to his heart.

In verse 5 we saw that joy was brought to him because of their participation in the service of the gospel with him. They preached this gospel with him, and when he left them they continued to preach the gospel, but we see in chapter 4 in the book of Acts that when he needed physical ministrations to himself - finance, specifically -

these Philippians, who were very poor, ministered to Paul out of their poverty. First of all we see in Corinthians that the Macedonians gave themselves unto the Lord, and because they had already given themselves unto the Lord they gave all that they had financially unto the Lord for the furtherance of the gospel - that's why Paul could rejoice that they were fellow labourers with him in the gospel of Christ. We asked ourselves: how do we sacrifice, how do we give for the cause of the gospel?

In verse 6 we then found that his joy was engendered by an anticipation of perfection - what a verse! We spent the whole of that previous Sunday, before Bill Freel came and ministered to us, looking at verse 6: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ". I know it was a great joy for me to be able to take my eyes off myself for a change and focus my eyes upon Jesus, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith, the Initiator and 'Finishiator' of everything that we are. He has begun the good work, He will continue the good work, and He will ultimately consummate the good work in the day of Jesus Christ, when He will present us faultless, blameless before the throne of His heavenly Father with great - what? Joy!

I hope that brings you great joy too. It is the joy of the sculptor when he looks at a big slab of rock and stone, and you or I with our eyes can't see any beauty or any artistic talent even that has gone into it, but it is the sculptor's eye that sees what it's going to be, he sees what he wants. That is God's plan with us - people may look at us, you may look at other believers, you may even look into your own heart and think: 'Well, how will I ever be perfect? How will God ever make something of my life? Look at the failure that I have even committed in the week that has gone by!'. But I want you to see not from your perspective or others perspective, but from God's perspective: not what you are, but what one day He is going to make you to be! That changes everything.

One old saint of God put it like this: 'The Lord always looks at His people as they will be when they're done' - the Lord always looks at His people as they will be when they're done! Well, there's enough joy there to keep us going through the whole series, I think you'll agree with me, but we have one more to look at before we launch full-speed into the whole of this little epistle. It is simply this: Paul had great joy in his heart because of his affection for his brothers and sisters in Christ, because of his affection for his brothers and sisters in Christ. Specifically that is found in verses 7 to 11 that we're going to look at today. Look at verse 7: 'Even as it is meet', some translations put it, 'Even as it is right for me to think this of you all'. This was something that is more than appropriateness, something that was Paul's duty morally or spiritually, it's more than just rightness - not something that is expected of the saint of God, but something that was required! 'It is required', Paul is saying, 'that I have an affection toward you' - why? 'Because I have you in my heart'. He says: 'It is right for me to think this of you, it's right for me to have an affection of you, and it's right for me that this affection should begin in my heart'. Isn't that interesting, that he doesn't say that this affection comes from the heart, he says it comes first and foremost from the head? 'It is right for me to think this of you'.

That's very interesting, because through the pop culture in which I know that I have grown up in and many of you young people have grown up in, love is portrayed as a feeling. We have to be very careful that we don't have a feeling-less love as Christians, and there is an emotional element to love and devotion, even towards God, and there is something that must have feeling. We must be careful that as fundamental Christians we do not become feeling-less Christians. But we must also be careful to notice where the feelings ought to come from, and where love ultimately ought to stem from, and what the seed of love must be. It always must generate from the mind. Love starts in the mind. A contemporary Christian artist called Don Francisco has a song, and one of the lines within it says: 'Love is not a feeling, it's an act of your will'. Love is not a feeling, it is an act of your will - and that's true, 'charity' in the Authorised Version that you find in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, that is a good translation. It's sometimes misunderstood today, and that's why we often substitute it with 'love', but 'charity' is a good translation - why? Because charity is the thought of love in action, and that is what love really is - it is an action. But you know that an action is only an execution of a thought.

So you see that there's much more in love than just a feeling, before the feeling comes and act of your will, and before that act of your will comes a thought - and that's why Paul goes to the very source of his love and his affection toward these Philippians, and he says: 'It is right for me to think this of you all'. The mind is so important in the Christian life, and sadly today many Christians are encouraged to set aside the mind. We don't really interpret spirituality as being intellectualism, we don't agree with that, we don't believe it's important for you to have degrees in theology to be spiritual or even to preach the gospel or anything like that - but what we must beware of is an anti-intellectualism that sets aside the mind, and that encourages us not to think at all. Whenever we look at the source of all our love, whether it be our love to God and to Christ, and even our love to other brothers and sisters, it begins in the mind! When we contemplate and meditate upon what God has done for us, and indeed what our other brothers and sisters are toward us in Christ, it makes that affection well up within our hearts - but it starts in our mind.

Well, let's move on because he had great joy in praising God because of this deep affection that began in his mind, that started with an act of his will, but he says this - he said in verse 3: 'I have you in my mind', and now he's saying in verse 7: 'I have you in my heart'. There's two things that I want you to see today from these verses. The first is found in verses 7 and 8, and it is Paul's example to us, Paul's example to us with regards to his affection toward his brothers and sisters in Christ. The second thing is Paul's prayer for us in verses 9, 10 and 11, when he prays for us that we would have certain characteristics, certain attributes, that would help us and enable us to love our brothers and sisters the right way in the Lord Jesus.

So let's look first of all at verses 7 and 8, Paul's example to us. He says: 'I have you in my heart'. So they're in his mind, but they have moved now from his mind into his heart - and I want to ask you this question: you may have your brothers and sisters in Christ all around you in your mind on a regular basis, they may even be in your prayers as you're on your knees before the throne of grace, but what I want to ask you - and I'm asking myself this - are they in your heart? That's a different thing. I think it was the founder of OM, George Verwer, that talked about the 18 inch journey that is such a distance for most Christians to make, and that is the journey from the head to the heart. It's probably the longest journey in the universe, but it's the journey that we as Bible-leaving Christians have to struggle with - not just filling our minds with knowledge, but that knowledge is being almost precipitated and falling as rain and dew into our hearts and making us the type of people and creatures that God wants us to be in the new covenant.

There are many Christians that we may be able to say of: 'I have you on my nerves'! But it's hard to say: 'I have you in my heart'. Let me please make you aware that Paul isn't being pretentious when he's talking like this, this isn't an arm round your brother or sister and saying: 'Oh, I love you', and it's really hot air, there's no depth to it. This is not hypocritical, and what proves that it's not pretentious or hypocritical is the fact that the apostle is bursting with it - he can't hide the love that he has for his brothers and sisters in Christ, and it overflows in the great joy that he has as he prays for them, as he thinks about them, and now as he expresses to them the love that is deep down in his heart.

Now we're very good, as New Testament believers, at listing for everyone on Sunday the evidences of salvation: you've to leave sin, you've to repent of your sin, you've to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and have believed in Him by faith - of course upon the foundation of grace alone. We know all of this, and we're not to add to the Gospel and we're not to take away, and that is what the Gospel is. Then we go on to the proof of salvation: we need to have a love for the Lord and follow Him and obey His commandments - but so much of the time we forget that one of the fundamental evidences of salvation in the life of the human being is love! It is a love that is expressed not just to God, but to our neighbour and to our brothers and sisters in Christ. One of these days, it's in the back of my mind, I hope it's there from God, maybe I'll get round to doing a series, I would love to do a series - and don't one of you do it now that I've told you this! - a series on our neighbour.

Well, 1 John chapter 3, here's a verse we could start on: 'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren'. We know! When? 'How do I know I'm saved? I mean, I'd be turning up Romans

10:13 'Him that calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved' - what does John say? You know that you're saved - do you love your brother? It's challenging stuff, but really what it's saying is that this love between one another is a spiritual lubrication that keeps the machinery of life within the church running smoothly. Paul expresses it by saying: 'It is meet to think this of you all'. He doesn't separate any particular clique or group that meets for supper on a specific night - it's 'you all'! He loves them all, he doesn't want to leave any of them out, and at least nine times in this epistle he uses this phrase 'you all'. It's an inclusive love, an all-inclusive love.

Now here's the proof of his love, and this is tremendous because it's not just in his head and it's not just in his heart, but it's something that overflows in his actions towards them. You go on and read in verse 7: 'Inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace'. 'Ach Paul, you've told us you're praying for us. Paul, you've told us that you have us in your head, you've even told us that you have us in your heart - but how do we know that you really love us?'. 'I'm in prison for you! That's how you know that I love you! I am the apostle unto the Gentiles in the bonds of Jesus Christ for you all! When I stood up and preached the Gospel and defended it I was stoned, when I stood before the court and defended it I was whipped and beaten and left for dead, on occasions I was so many days and nights in the deep for the Gospel - that's how you know that I love you!'.

Love is not something that is to be talked, but something that is to be practised. How is it to be practised? Well, we've many evidence is in scripture, but what I want you to see specifically today is that this is not something that you walk out of the Iron Hall this morning and say: 'Right, new slate! I'm going to love everybody', and you go out and kiss everybody and hug everybody, and you come back tonight and bring presents back to everybody and wee cards telling them that you love them so much - this is not something that you can work up. We know this because Paul says this, that he has this love in his heart, but he attributes the source of this love as being the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 8: 'For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ'. This isn't something that you can just decide to do, although there has to come a time in response to obedience to God that you decide to do it, but it's something that is supernatural in its origin and in its source. It must come out of a fellowship, a communion, and a joining between you and Jesus Christ - because ultimately it's not your love, it's the very affection of Jesus Christ!

God doesn't do this in us, specifically, Paul is saying that this is something that God does through us. One translation puts it well: 'in the affections, or in the love of Jesus Christ'. It's not the fact the Holy Spirit is getting across that Paul's love was channelled through the name and the person of Christ, but rather Christ's love is being channelled through the personality and the individual of Paul the apostle! Now sometimes in the quaint translation of the Authorised Version there are some statements that are very hard to grapple with, and this is one of them: 'I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ'. You think to yourself sometimes: 'Oh, surely there's a better translation than that?'. Sometimes there may be, sometimes words have changed, and we can change this to 'affection', change it to 'love', but sometimes when we change these words we lose the real impact of what is being said in the ancient world. The reason I say that is because the bowels were seen in the ancient world as not part of our digestive production, but rather not part our eating system, but the seat of the affections, the place where we loved from, the real guts of our personality, our being, where we have our deep emotional reactions - they're supposed to register, according to the ancient mind, down here in the bowels of the human being. It's a kind of centre of our sympathetic nervous system, our physical sensations of shock and nausea and compassion and love come from it - and you can testify to that even yourself, at times when you see an awful scene, or you feel afraid, or you get a great shock, you feel your tummy going - and I can feel it going even this morning, but it's not because of that, it's for other reasons! You can feel that there are affections and movings that come here from down deep in your being, and what Paul is saying is that it's as if that part of Jesus Christ physically was taken and translated into something spiritual and was transplanted into my body, that I am longing and loving after you with His affections!

Well, this is something else. Have you ever experienced that? I can say that I've experienced love, I would hope that I've experienced maybe the love of God through me to another, but I wonder at times have I really

experienced the actual love of the Lord Jesus Christ being administered in me, through me, to other people? That I am actually feeling His emotions? We're on holy ground today, and I have to be very careful, but this thought is just coming to me now that in Hebrews it talks of our Lord Jesus as being a Great High Priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but this really turns that on its head for a moment, doesn't it? We become touched with the feelings of His infirmities, as He looks on human nature and human beings, and even as He looks on other believers in Christ whom we are joined to in His own body, and He loves after them as He has deep affection over them - that we feel it?

Romans chapter 5, I think, really speaks of this when it says: 'God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us, He has shed His love abroad in our hearts'. Well, that's what Paul says, but have we experienced that? That's Paul's example to us, but I want to take you on further to Paul's prayer for us that we might have this as our experience in our lives. His example is: 'I have you in my heart', but his prayer is: 'I have you in my prayer'. The first thing that he prays for, you'll find, is in verse 9 and that is that the same love: 'that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment'. First and foremost, now note these down - and please, if you're coming to these meetings, bring a pen and a paper with you. I have no fear of being taken for granted, but I'll tell you this: when I labour in the study and before God, I would hate to think that these truths are just going in one ear and out the other, and you're forgetting them all - so bring a pen and a paper and jot this down.

This is what Paul wants you to pray for yourself, so that you can love other believers, and what he was praying for you: one, an abounding love, an abounding love. Mr Ways (sp?) translates it like this, this whole section that we've read, and this is tremendous, listen: 'This is a love that rises higher and higher to its fullest development in recognition of the truth, and in a comprehensive grasp of its application; thus furnishing you with a sure test of what is true excellence, so that you may remain untainted by error, unstumbling amidst obstacles, till the day of Messiah's appearing, bearing the while a full harvest of righteousness attained through Jesus our Messiah and redounding to the praise and glory of God' - now that's tremendous! He prays for a life filled, penetrated, permeated, by such a love that will eventually lead you to be a mature Christian in the way that you will have most sensitive virtues toward other believers, and you will have the highest knowledge of God and men that is possible - and that is only possible, Paul says, if you have love!

You hear the saying: 'Love is blind', and that may be true of an airy fairy, silly affection, but I'll tell you this: this divine love brings not blindness but the highest knowledge of divine truth that is possible. Paul is saying that through this love we enter the most exciting exhilarating experiences of the highest expressions of love that are possible in life! An abounding love...well, how can we tell that we're abounding in love toward other believers? Well, the first thing is that you'll be concerned about them. I haven't time to go into all this, but let me leave you with a verse, 1 John 3:18: 'My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth'. You will be concerned about other people. Another thing: you will be willing to forgive other people - that's a hard one for some people to swallow. First Peter 4:8: 'And above all things have fervent charity' - love - 'among yourselves: for charity shall cover a multitude of sins'.

Paul put it probably the most succinctly in 1 Corinthians 13 verse 5 when he said this, and one translation puts it like this: 'Love keeps no record of wrongs'. Do you keep a record of wrongs of what your brother and sister in Christ has done to you? 'I can never forgive them for that!'. If you can never forgive them for that, you will never love them because of that. An abounding love, we must move on: he prays for a perceptive love. Now this is interesting because love is not all-inclusive of error, it doesn't mean that you just have to love everything whether it's true or false, but it's something that the translation that Mr Way gave that I read out to you, he translates it like this: 'This is a love that remains untainted by error and unstumbling amidst obstacles' - it's a discerning love. I believe what Paul specifically means in this context is that this is a love not only that will enable you to perceive error and truth, but it is a love that will enable you to perceive how best to love other people. A love that will tell you how to best love others!

Paul says: 'I pray that you will increase in knowledge and depth of understanding', that literally could be translated: 'in all judgement, depth of insight, that you'll be able to discern what's best for other people' - to distinguish the things that are really good for a person and the things that really matter from a variety of competing possibilities. It can all be summed up in this question: do you know how to love someone? I mean, if we all went home and made a list out on 'How could I love my brother?' - usually the answers, I would imagine, that would be given by most of us would be: don't be cruel to him, don't say nasty things to him, don't give him angry looks - it's all negative! But it is positives that Paul is talking about: 'Oh that God would give us an abounding love, but oh that God would give us a perceptive love that would see the needs that there are in other people's lives, so that we could love them positively, love them intelligently, and meet the needs that they have'.

We must move on, a sincere love, he says. He says that you will be sincere: '...That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be', verse 10, 'sincere and without offence till the day of Christ'. The English word 'sincere' comes from the Latin which means 'without wax'. Carpenters, not too good carpenters mind you, but in olden days they used to carve things out, and if they made a fault or a flaw they used to conceal it with wax, and when the wax hardened they painted over it and varnished over it. Even a sculptor, when he was sculpting out of the rock, he would fill in the cracks and the faults and his lack of skill with wax - it would be just furnished over - but 'sincere' means 'without wax'! Without faults, without insincerity, to be pure, to be unsullied, it means to be transparent in your love for others, to be known on the outside for what you are on the inside, to be seen through and through - it is the exact antithesis and the opposite of what it is to be a hypocrite!

The word 'hypocrite' comes from the Greek which means to be an actor, and there are people that come in - probably the greatest theatre at times is the church, where people come on the stage with their Bible and with their great suit, and with their great oratory, and their flowery theological language - but the outside is not a reflection of what is on the inside! If there is true love, and if we love in the bowels of Jesus Christ, there will be a love that is transparent. Secondly there will be a love that is truthful, Abraham Lincoln said: 'I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to what light that I have. I must stand with anybody who stands right, I must stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong'. It must be a transparent love, it must be a truthful love, it must be a real love!

During the war there was a radio play that was conducted by actors, and they were called 'The Free Company', and one of the players was heard to say over the airwaves one day to a companion actor: 'You sound like a preacher, only it sounds real'. You sound like a preacher, only it sounds real! What perception are we giving to the world in our airwaves? What are we communicating to them? What am I communicating through the pulpit? Am I communicating that this is a role; that this is something that I do on a Sunday; that this is something that I just have to get through for half an hour, and you've to get through, and then we all go home and we go through the motions again? Is that what we are? Is it like watching the television? 'That was a good show today', and we'll go home and we'll talk about it? Is it transparent? Is it truthful? And is it real?

If it's sincere it will be without offence, without falseness, it will never make anybody stumble to the day of Jesus Christ until we stand before the judgement seat - and fourthly and finally it's a fruitful love. Verse 11: 'Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God' - a fruitful love! This is a love that will give you a holy character. This is different than the fruits of faith, this is not in relation to our service or our activity for God, but this has got to do with our personality, got to do with our character that is dominated by love - not what we do for God, but who and what we are for Him. Love is the root of all righteousness, righteousness is the fruit and love is the root - the root is idealistic, what we believe; but the fruit is realistic, what people see that we are!

What a love Paul had for these believers. F. B. Meyer said the apostle had got so near the very heart of the Lord that he could hear its throb, he could detect its beat, nay it seemed as though the tender mercies of Jesus to these

Philippians were throbbing in his own heart! As if the heart of Christ dwelt in Paul! Because he had the heart of Christ his compassion was transformed in all of his human relationships, and it placed his love from a natural and emotional plain onto a supernatural and divine plain - and it enabled him, like God, to love people who are unlovely, to love the unthankful, to love the indifferent, and compelled him even to pray for those whom he loved.

The three themes that we have looked at in this introduction all tell us how to be joyful Christians, and how to be a joyful church. Now listen carefully as I close here today, because this is important: one, the unity of the church will bring us all joy. Do you see if you're a divisive spirit? Stop it or get out! The unity of the church brings joy, the faithful partnership in the Gospel as we work together brings joy, and the growth of our knowledge one toward another as we try to find out how we can love one another better - all of this will bring great joy as we fellowship with one another! Do you remember what they said about the early Church? It marked them: 'Look how they love one another!', it's almost said sarcastically today: 'Look how they love one another!' Our impact on this generation today, I believe, is dependent on how the church gets on with each other.

Paul said: 'Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mystery, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains and have not charity, I am nothing'. You know that I love poetry, and I want to read you a poem as we close, it just epitomises and summarises everything that we've learnt so far, and especially what we have learnt this morning. Listen carefully, it's a prayer, I don't know who the author is:

'There was a time when in my daily prayer
I asked for all the things I deemed most fair,
And necessary to my life -- success,
Riches, of course, and ease, and happiness;
A host of friends, a home without alloy;
A primrose path of luxury and joy,
Social distinction, and enough of fame
To leave behind a well-remembered name.

Ambition ruled my life. I longed to do
Great things, that all my little world might view
And whisper, "Wonderful!"
Ah, patient God,
How blind we are, until Thy shepherd's rod
Of tender chastening gently leads us on
To better things!

Ah, Love divine, how empty was that prayer
Of other days! That which was once so fair --
Those flimsy baubles which the world calls joys
Are nothing to me now but broken toys,
Outlived, outgrown. I thank Thee that I know
Those much-desired dreams of long ago,
Like butterflies, have had their summer's day
Of brief enchantment and have gone. I pray
For better things.
Thou knowest, God above,
My one desire now -- Teach me to love'.

Let's pray, and let's ask ourselves as we bow our heads: do we really know that experience in our hearts of the love of God being shed abroad, poured into our hearts? Do we know what it is to feel with the emotions of Jesus Christ, because we have the thoughts that He thinks through the word of God? Can we pray for that abounding, perceptive, sincere, and fruitful love? And will we go away from this meeting now and pray that we will find ways, ingenious ways, of loving our brethren and sisters?

Father, we thank Thee for the love of Jesus, how deep is the love of Jesus - vast, unmeasured, boundless and free - that four-dimensional love that we cannot measure. Lord we pray that it would be poured into our hearts, that it will overflow not only to Thyself as His great love did when He was on the earth and as it still does in glory, but our Father, that it would overflow to those around us in Christ, in the church, and those around us in this district - that they would see the love of God in us, that they would see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven. Oh, breathe on us breath of God, fill us with life anew, that we may love what Thou dost love, and do what Thou wouldst do. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 5

"Suffering: The Catalyst Of The Gospel"

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Philippians 1:12-18

Now we're turning to Philippians chapter 1 again, and our subject is 'Suffering: The Catalyst of the Gospel', and we begin our reading at verse 12. Let me say while you're looking that up, I forgot to mention that we will be having our early morning prayer meeting as usual on Wednesday morning at seven o'clock, God willing - so please do join us if you can at that.

Verse 12: "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice".

I wonder have you ever said to yourself: 'I'm useless'? 'I'm useless, there are other people that God seems to use for good and for the gospel, but I just feel useless!'. Well, I think Paul could have perhaps had the temptation to say that as he is in prison, the great missionary of the Mediterranean, the apostle to the Gentile world - I'm sure there was a temptation for him to think himself: 'Well, I'm not locked up here under house arrest, and I'm useless for God - what good is a suffering, persecuted evangelist that can't reach the lost, that can't go out as a missionary to reach the world around?'.

Well, we find that in this little epistle his reaction and his attitude to his being in prison was the exact opposite, because he's overflowing with great joy - and we learnt in the weeks that have gone by the reason that he had such great joy in the Lord. But ultimately the one common denominator, and the fundamental reason why Paul rejoiced in such grave and awful suffering, was because he knew that through his suffering the gospel of Jesus Christ was being advanced. Through his imprisonment the gospel was going forth in a way, perhaps, that couldn't have been possible but for the fact that Paul the apostle was imprisoned in Rome.

Now I know through my daily visiting to people in hospital, and in their houses going through problems, I know even looking on the television screen and reading the newspapers, and you don't need to even do those things - just walking through and down life's road you know that there are people, even Christians, who feel imprisoned in their lives. That imprisonment can be caused by many and varied reasons, it could be a feeling, as women, that you're imprisoned within your home and all the chores and domestic responsibilities that you have; both men and women may feel imprisoned in their workplace, they work 9 to 5, or perhaps greater hours than that, and they would like to do something for God, but they find that they just don't have as much time as they would like. Some people are shut in, or maybe lying in bed with an illness or disease, or with paralysis, crippled with some kind of ailment, and they feel useless - they feel that something, whether it is something that is a disease or circumstantial in their life, is hemming them in, restricting them, imprisoning them to what they could do and what they feel they could perhaps be for God if that thing wasn't there.

What accentuates the problem, and rubs salt into the wound, is that we often hear, and it's freely heard now with satellite television, charismatic theology that comes across in so many different and varied ways. Our Bible bookshelves are full of all these paperbacks, we get them over the radio preaching that we shouldn't have

suffering in our life - and I even hear it said even in our own prayer meeting, that it's not God's will that people should suffer. My friends, we have to be extremely careful in the things that we listen to, to the teachings that we imbibe, and to even the prayers that we pray - because when you imbibe this type of theology and philosophy that it's never ever God's will that anyone should suffer, you then make the conclusion that you are not living God's best if you are experiencing suffering. Then that precipitates a prayer in your life: 'Lord, if I'm not living Your best, and if I'm suffering, then there's something wrong with my life, and I want You to remove this reason for my suffering because I want to be better for You, and I know that I cannot be better unless I am rid of this imprisonment, whatever it may be'.

Now listen very carefully to me, because I don't want to be misunderstood, because it's very easy when you're preaching on the subject of suffering to be misunderstood. I am not talking about things that we can change in our lives. I'm not talking about sins that we can get rid of, that we must get rid of and the word of God commands us to do so - those sins that so easily beset us. I'm not even talking about doubtful things or legitimate things that can weigh us down that we can change, habits that we can put out, habits that we can bring into our lives to make us more godly, to make us more effective and useful for Christ - that is not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about imprisonments and circumstances that are purely providential from the hand of God. They have come into your life and there is nothing, humanly speaking, that you can do about it, but you feel that it restricts your service for God.

Now this problem of suffering, human suffering, is one of the profoundest questions - theological and philosophical - that has ever faced the human mind and intellect. It's so difficult to understand. We meet it when we evangelise with people: 'Why does God, if He is sovereign and He can do anything, why does He allow people to suffer?'. Now, I'm not standing up here today claiming that I have all the answers, I have far from all the answers, I may not even have any answers apart from what I can glean from the word of God - but I want you to remember in all of your analysing personally and of others, what they're going through in their life with regards to suffering, I want you to remember always two fundamental things. The first is this: suffering is the result of the fall of man, suffering does not come from God, suffering comes from sin which has been instigated by original sin in our forefathers in the Garden of Eden, from the fall of man. But the converse of that, and the other side of the coin which you must always remember as a Christian is that although God is not the originator of suffering, God in His providence can work for good in suffering. God can take that same suffering and work out His eternal purposes and plans in it.

That is the marvellous thing that we find in this epistle, that God can bring the best results out of the darkest circumstances. Now let's not make the confusion of what I will be speaking on this morning, what Paul is addressing in this book: we're not talking about suffering that results from sin - you get that in the Bible, there is suffering even in the life of a believer that results from sin, and you can see it in the book of 1 Corinthians, and we'll be dealing with it later on in our Bible Reading. Around the Lord's table there were some of them who were weak and sickly, some of them even dying, Paul said, who were asleep because there was sin in the camp as they were breaking bread - they were getting drunk at the Lord's table, it specifically says they were drinking unworthily, unthoughtfully, without thinking it they were coming and drinking at the Lord's table and eating like some kind of a banquet. Their sin brought judgement upon them, and you can have judgement and suffering in your life because of sin, but that's not what we're talking about today.

In the book of Job we find another reason for suffering, we read that Job didn't sin with his mouth when he was in all the talking with God and going through all of his awful experiences - what I believe the book of Job is teaching us, and the path that Job was being brought along by the Spirit of God, was to reveal to him more about the person of God. Job didn't understand all that he needed about God, so God brought him through this process of suffering to reveal more about Himself to him. We can have suffering in our lives because of sin, but we can also have suffering as a discipline in our lives to be drawn nearer to God and have God revealed to us in a way that could only happen through our suffering.

The third reason is found in the personality of Paul the apostle himself, because God can take up suffering and He can use it in His providential sovereignty as a device to prevent sin in our lives as Christians. Paul's thorn in the flesh, that he incidentally came to God three times and prayed that God would remove, God said He wouldn't remove it, His grace would be sufficient for his need at that particular time - but the reason why He wouldn't remove it was because it was for his good. He'd had so many revelations, he'd been shown so many mysteries about the future and about the church Jesus Christ, that the temptation was very great for him to become proud. So God gave him suffering as a device to prevent sin in his life.

The fourth reason, and I don't say that this list is exhaustive, but the fourth reason is what we're looking at today and it's this: suffering can and often is used to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now if you're sitting in our meeting today and you're suffering, can I tell you - provided you're not suffering from sin, and only you can answer that - you may be suffering to learn more about God, you may be suffering to prevent sin in your life, but even if it's one of those latter three that I've mentioned, it can be included in this advancement of the Gospel. You've got to see in your mind and your heart today that your suffering is not a prison! Your suffering is not a barrier to the Gospel, but primarily it is the greatest catalyst to the Gospel that the New Testament knows!

It, above perhaps anything, evangelistically, can precipitate change in your life and in the lives of those people around you. I want you to see from this passage today how the Gospel was advanced through Paul's suffering. Look first of all, he witnessed to the soldiers - we'll see that later - his suffering witnessed to the soldiers. Then his suffering brought encouragement to the church, they were encouraged to preach the Gospel because he was suffering for the Gospel. Then we find that it even motivated other preachers, some of them were rival preachers, some of them were ambitious and selfish, there were some who were perfectly sincere - but the great joy that was brought to the heart of the apostle was in the fact that no matter what or who was preaching the Gospel, Christ was being preached! No matter how much he suffered, no matter what he went through, even regardless of his own imprisonment in Rome, he had overflowing bubbling joy because Christ was being preached!

Now what I want to communicate to you today from these verses is that you will have real joy in suffering if you realise several things. One: if you realise that the Gospel is advanced through your suffering. Look at verse 12: 'But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel'. We ought never ever to lose sight of the Christian doctrine and philosophy that misfortune can serve a good purpose in the eyes of sovereign God. The key to that statement that misfortune can serve a good purpose is the word 'purpose'. Purpose! We are not a people that talk, or we ought not to talk or live according to chance. We don't talk about coincidence, we don't believe in luck or even fate, but we believe in the principle of divine purpose - that there is a God in heaven who is managing our affairs and our lives, and He has ways and plans for us.

Admittedly God's ways and God's plans at times can feel impossible toward us, we can't understand it, it seems absolutely foolish. It seems foolish to me that Paul, the great apostle, is locked up in prison. He is the greatest evangelising force in the Mediterranean world, yes in the church Jesus Christ of his age, yet God lets him get locked up. Now that doesn't make sense to my human rationale and reasoning, I don't understand it, especially when we think of the church that's pitifully small, and this is a death blow to them that their great apostle is locked up! But that's because we can't see the workings and mechanisms of God. Paul says the opposite to what we would think, verse 12, that through his being locked up in prison the Gospel is being advanced - that's what it literally means, advanced. One paraphrase says: 'Everything that has happened to me has been a great boost in getting out the good news concerning Christ'.

To the Philippians it seems like a disaster. Incidentally, isn't it interesting that it is often those who witness suffering that feel the pain the most? Those who are looking on, they're not going through the suffering but

they're going through watching the suffering - and it can seem worse to them, because in our human nature and in the nature of the Philippians who helped Paul on previous occasions, they just want to come to his aid, they want to release him from his prison, they want to help him, they want to minister to him, they want to stop all this stuff that doesn't seem to make sense for the Gospel to go abroad. Yet Paul didn't view it in that way, he says: 'No, but this has served as a divine purpose to give a great boost in getting the good news out!'.

Roy Lauren, the Christian author, said this: 'What seemed to sight to be a retardation, was to faith in fact an acceleration'. What seemed to hinder really served to help, what seemed to prevent in actual fact promoted, and what appeared to be misfortune provided a blessing! It wasn't just because of Paul's commitment to the Gospel, or Paul's commitment to Christ, but because in prison Paul was being an effective channel of the Gospel. Can I just say to you: we all pray for many many things, but we all know full well that we don't always get the answers to our prayers that we're looking for, or even the answer that we expect. It was exactly the same with the great apostle Paul. In Acts chapter 19 he expresses his wish to go to Jerusalem, and then 'After I have been there', he says, 'I must also see Rome'. God later on, in chapter 23 of Acts, says Paul: 'For as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also in Rome'. But He didn't tell him how he was going to bear witness, did He? He didn't tell him he was going to be a prisoner, that he wasn't going to be able to go out in the highways and byways and compel them to come in.

God doesn't always tell us everything when He answers our prayers, and maybe things don't turn out the way that we would like them to turn out, but Paul says in encouragement to us all who experience this perhaps on a weekly basis: when we can't make sense of what God is doing in some of His purposes, when we accept by faith it will bring joy, and it will radically affect other people in the Gospel - the Gospel will advance! You will have real joy in suffering not only if you realise that the Gospel is advanced, but also that your testimony is witnessed. Look at verse 13: 'So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace', or the Praetorium, 'and in all other places'. The Romans even were affected by Paul's great joy in his suffering.

You have to remember that Paul probably was obscure to everybody in the city of Rome, he was an unknown, anonymous - but all of a sudden he gets put in prison and everybody knows his name. He becomes a spectacle. He goes from anonymity to the attention of the palace, or literally the Praetorium Guard, the great barracks where all the Imperial bodyguards met and slept and ate. It goes further, it says 'not only in the palace but in all other places'. It all stemmed from him being put in prison. Now his influence wasn't just confined to the church at Philippi, or even the church at Rome, but his influence was going through the whole of the Imperial guard, going through slaves and courtiers and even the general population of the city of Rome.

Paul was in prison, but don't think that he was in - well, I nearly said a prison like our prisons, but he definitely wasn't in a prison like our prisons - he was under house arrest. He wasn't behind bars or anything like that, he was probably in the grounds of the Praetorium, the grounds of that barracks in a little house. In all likelihood there was chained to his arm a Roman Praetorian guard, a soldier, 24 hours a day chained onto the apostle Paul. He would swap over every six hours and do shifts, like many of you do in your work, but imagine what it would've been like to have been that Praetorian guard shackled to the apostle Paul - it would have been a nightmare, in my opinion at least!

When you think and consider that John Mark and Demas - I imagine, maybe reading in a little bit to the narrative in the New Testament - but I think they found it hard going with Paul. Hard going following that little old man with all his disabilities and ailments, yet ploughing on the Gospel into all of Europe. It was difficult, and they forsook him, they left him - but what would it have been like to have been this soldier who had no interest in the Gospel, no interest in Christ, and every day this man is reading the Scriptures, he's on his knees praying and the soldier has to get down on his knees, and then he's maybe fasting, and then he's over in the corner of the room getting his parchment and getting his quill and starting to write a letter to the Philippians or to the Ephesians or some other church. He's up and down in prayers and fastings often, and telling this person of the great gospel and the great joy that he has!

From each one of those soldiers, I believe, each one of them remember every six hours going back to the barracks and another one coming - Paul couldn't get out to preach the Gospel, what was he doing? He was bringing them to him and preaching the Gospel in the circumstances that he found himself in! What an encouragement that is! Paul had a captive audience 24 hours a day of one chained onto his arm! We believe that many were converted, and we believe that the Gospel went into the population of Rome because of that. Now let me point this out to you in case you miss it, that the result of Paul's predicament was out of all proportion to the disadvantage that he suffered! It was out of all proportion to what you would think would be the outcome of being in prison, you would have thought that this type of a revival would happen by the great man standing on Acropolis and preaching the Gospel to all the philosophers, but no: it came disproportionately from the suffering that he endured.

Bishop T.W. Jury (sp?) said: 'The very chain which Roman discipline riveted on the prisoner's arm secured to his side a hearer who would tell the story of patient suffering for Christ among those who the next day might be in attendance on Nero himself'. That's what we mean when we said last Monday night that the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. Can I ask you this morning: what are your chains? What is your imprisonment? Is it a bed? Is it a sickness? People listening to me on tape who can't get out to join in fellowship with us - what is it? Is it your home? Ladies, is it your kitchen sink? Men, is it the lack of money - an economic imprisonment, you just can't seem to break out of this debt, or the wages don't seem to go up as much as you would like? And you feel that because of these things your life serves no useful purpose. Would you please remember this: you are being observed by other people!

If you have real joy in your suffering they will see it everyday in the office, in the classroom, at home, every hour. What do they see when they scrutinise you? Some people go into the hospital, maybe for a minor operation, and they don't know why it is - but then they get to speak to someone in the right-hand bed, or in the left-hand bed, or a nurse, or a doctor - and for such a time as this, like Esther, they can often be brought into hospital. I've heard it! Brought into hospital to meet someone who they could meet in no other way, to share the Gospel and that person gets saved! Remember in your suffering, although you may feel imprisoned, although you may feel useless, remember that the Gospel potentially can be advanced through your suffering! Your testimony is being witnessed!

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that you jump up and down and shout 'Hallelujah' when you go through trial. I'm not saying that you have really feel in your heart and work up some kind of emotion: 'Oh this is God's will and I ought to be happy' - but what I want you to see is that suffering above maybe anything else is God's providential pulpit to preach the Gospel. Life has its prisons as well as its palaces, and the sooner we accept that this is God's way of sharing the Gospel with others, many will see it and fear and will trust in the Lord.

Thirdly you will have real joy in suffering if you realise that the church is encouraged. The church is encouraged, verse 14: 'Many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear'. This attitude of joy was contagious, not only among the Roman soldiers, but among the church in Philippi. Kenneth Wuest translates this verse: 'Fearlessly they were breaking their silence and speaking the word'. They were emboldened to preach the Gospel, they had fearful surroundings but when they saw the example of Paul and what he was going through and the joy that overflowed, well they just went out nevertheless and preached the Gospel - and we read that there were many saved.

Now what am I teaching you? It's this: your testimony is being witnessed, but also in the church of Jesus Christ you can never ever know the extent and the significance of how you suffer for Christ - you'll never know! The influence that you're perhaps having at this very moment on other Christians - never underestimate it - by the way that you suffer, the way that you go through pain. It may be that God has to put these chains on you and put you in this prison to help other people, to encourage other people in the church of Jesus Christ. Mothers, it may

be that you feel chained because you have to share the Gospel with other mothers. Businessman, you may feel chained because you have to share it with people that I could never reach. Person who is sick with a debilitating disease, you may be able to share the Gospel with other patients that I will never meet. We all have our little parishes to go to and to share the Gospel.

Think of Susanna Wesley, 19 children day after day - what that must have been like before any mod-cons or disposable nappies - and she ploughed her life of godliness and prayer, and two of her sons, John and Charles, turned Britain upside-down for Jesus Christ and we're still living in the influence of it! Fanny Crosby, blinded from six weeks old as a child, but she was not left in darkness with regard to her influence for Jesus Christ - we're still singing her hymns and it brings great joy to the church of Jesus Christ at large, because she realised that the church is encouraged by the way that we face our suffering.

He'll not like me saying this, but there's a young man in Portadown, and after I preach this sermon he will transcribe every word and he will put it on the internet. He is confined to a wheelchair, he has pain daily, but he's doing something out of his suffering that I could never do - and it is advancing the Gospel! It is a testimony that people are seeing and it is encouraging other people and the church of Jesus Christ at large. We in the West need to realise that the church is not advanced through money or through power, but primarily through the suffering witness of the weak. Ask yourself: where is the church advancing in the world today? Is it in the States? Well, it's big in the States, but I wouldn't say it's advancing. We get all this bombardment of church growth literature from the United States, but we don't need the church growth movement of the US, what we need to get back to is the church growth movement of Ecuador! What's that? It's a man and his wife called Jim and Elisabeth Elliot and their little child Valerie, going to the Auca Indians, and Jim goes off on his own with four other missionaries and tries to contact them, and he is slain as a martyr for Christ - and then his wife Elisabeth takes up the mantle and goes into those people who killed her husband and learns their language, and writes down the word of God and shares the Gospel with them and brings her little child up in the midst of them, and they are saved and preaching the Gospel today! What is that? It is the spirit of the imprisoned Paul. How that rebukes us, but how it encourages us - we don't need new methods today, I think the greatest method that we could have is the suffering servant of Jesus Christ!

Fourthly, you will have real joy in suffering if you realise that the enemy is confounded, the enemy is confounded. If you look at verses 15 to 17 you find that some people were preaching Christ outside of prison for jealousy, some for strife, some out of party spirit, and some even to aggravate Paul's imprisonment - they were wanting Paul to get a hiding, proverbially, in prison because the Gospel was advancing outside. They thought: 'If we preach it, he'll get a beating'. Well, who are they? Well, all the scholars speculate, some say Judaisers, I don't think it is the Judaisers, because in all the things that Paul mentions here he doesn't mention that they're preaching a different message. He mentions that they're preaching Christ.

I think what we have here is people that weren't opposed to Paul's doctrine, but people who are opposed to Paul's personality. They're opposed to him as he is as a person, they're jealous of him, they're jealous of his success, jealous of how he gets on with people, how he is a great missionary, maybe because he is the great apostle. I don't think Paul would have rejoiced if they were preaching a false Gospel, in Galatians he anathematises, he curses people who are preaching a false Gospel. But I think what he is saying here is: 'I know these people are against me, I have a personality clash with them, or they have a personality clash with me, but I don't care because Christ is preached, the message is preached, and that's all that I'm worried about!'.

This is tremendous humility, isn't it? The word literally used here for strife and envy and all this is the word that was later used, came to be used, as canvassing for office. You know the politicians make you sick, you see them kissing the little babies and giving them sweets and all the rest, that type of hypocrisy, pretention - they were going to try and be like Paul, or try and be better than Paul, yet they were preaching the message. And Paul said: 'I don't care what their motive is, as long as Christ is preached'. Well, once they got Paul out of their way

they saw their opportunity to further and advance not the Gospel, but their own interest and influence, their self-seeking ambition. I think, if I was Paul, I would have got really upset - but what does he do? He gets real joy - why? Because if you believe in a sovereign, loving God who doesn't just put you through life's prisons for kicks but has a purpose, has a plan and a design, you can also believe in a God who can overrule even false preaching and bring people to Christ through it!

It's wonderful, he didn't care! Not that he didn't care about error, but he didn't care to fight battles for his own name - he knew that the wrath of God would praise him. Well, you think of Joseph, that's who I thought of when I was studying - all that Joseph went through, and at the end of his awful life, we haven't got time to go into it but you know about it, but it was said like a summary and a conclusion: 'But as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring to pass as it is this day to save much people alive'. Isn't it wonderful that God can even work through the personality clashes? Look at Paul and Barnabas, He overruled it and brought it round for good!

Whether it's emperors persecuting the early Church in the Acts - what was it doing? In effect it was just driving the Christians all over Europe, and driving the Gospel with them! Whether it's the Puritans, King Charles chases them out of the United Kingdom, out of England, but they landed at Plymouth Rock and they founded the great Christian Commonwealth that used to be the United States of America. God meant it for good! And then in the States they had that Civil War, and out of that awful bloody war Lincoln, the great Christian president, he's able to free all the slaves - and what came out of blood came to victory in Christ. Again the wrath of man is turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel! The poet put it like this:

'Careless seems the great Avenger;
History's pages but record
One death-grapple in the darkness
'Twixt old systems and the Word;
Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne;
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow
Keeping watch upon His own'.

The enemy is confounded even in our suffering. You will have real joy in your suffering if you realise that the Christ is preached. Listen to what he said, he didn't say 'Because I preach Christ'. He didn't rejoice because he was preaching it, he rejoiced because Christ was preached. In modern jargon could I paraphrase it: he couldn't care less as long as Christ is preached! As long as, as he says in Thessalonians, the Gospel has free course. He's not excusing error, he's not saying that we have to be blinded to error, but he's acknowledging that in spite of a system that's unbiblical God can do something not because of the system but regardless of the system!

There's a man here this morning and he was pointed to Christ by a man who wasn't a believer. How do you work that one out? I've heard of people who have heard a pop song, and it has clicked something in their mind; I've heard of people watching a film, seeing a billboard, and it just engenders something in their heart and in their mind because God is sovereign and He can take anything up - even in the most ungodly religions and systems, you see Martin Luther mounting up those steps on his knees bleeding for penance and God reveals to him: 'The just shall live by faith', not works, faith!

Oh, we rejoice that Christ is preached. Let me say, as we close today, we are epistles written unto men. The only Bible that some people will read is you, and they will read how you suffer. This was the Master's method was it not? The Lord Jesus Christ going through such agony and torment on Calvary, but the purpose of His

suffering was God's redemptive work and our salvation! Is a servant above his Master? No, Paul says, 'That I may know Him, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus'.

Billy Strachan, who we know and lovingly remember, wrote a little book on the book of Philippians and he called it this: 'You Can Be Fruitful in Your Isolation'. Did you hear that? God has a plan for you to give you life's greatest joy, even in its greatest darkest hours.

Father, we pray this morning for all those in our gathering who are suffering in one way or another. We pray that You will engender that Spirit-given joy shed abroad in their heart by faith, to realise that in their suffering the Gospel can be advanced, their testimony is witnessed, the church is encouraged, the enemy is confounded, and the Christ is preached. Father, help us to suffer well. None of us wants to suffer, but Lord help us that in it we would be on our Father's love relying, Jesus every need supplying, or in living, or in dying, to know all will be well. So help us to take with us this morning that great promise of Thy word, that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose - for we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus, that Man of Sorrows who suffered that we might know the joy of sins forgiven. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 6

"The Joy of Suffering Service - Part 1"

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Philippians 1:18-26

Now we're turning in our Bibles to Philippians chapter 1, Philippians chapter 1 beginning to read at verse 18 where we left off - the last verse we studied last Lord's Day morning. We're beginning at that verse again to get the flow of Paul's thoughts as we leave the passage that we thought about last week that spoke to us of how suffering is the catalyst of the gospel, and how Paul's great joy was in the fact that through his own personal suffering and the sufferings of the Philippians and other believers that the gospel is advanced.

So in verse 18 we begin: "What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again".

Last Lord's Day in verses 12 through to 18 we looked at how the suffering of saints, specifically the suffering of the apostle, affected the advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We took time to look at how it affected his witness, even in that prison, to the Praetorian Guard. Men, Roman soldiers, were being converted, and they were going back to their barracks and even to the city of Rome and telling others about the great gospel of Christ. The gospel was spreading in a way that we could not have conceived or even planned it to have spread any other way, but that Paul was locked up in this prison cell. We looked at how this suffering for the Gospel advanced the Gospel in the witness and testimony and encouragement it gave to the church of Jesus Christ. Others, within Philippi specifically, were emboldened to go and share the Gospel because of the courage of Paul in doing so even in his bonds.

We saw that the gospel was advanced through his sufferings because the enemy was confounded, and even those who were preaching Christ in contention, who had a personality clash with Paul and really were preaching the gospel so that Paul could suffer even more in prison, it was confounded in the fact that Paul had a transcendent joy that just was exalted in the fact that Christ was preached, no matter how He was preached or who preached Him. We saw finally and most fundamentally that Paul's great joy in his suffering was because out of all these things Christ, ultimately, was preached - that was his great joy, that the name of Christ was uplifted and souls were being saved because of it.

Well now Paul turns personal, and he begins to talk about how his joy in suffering advances the gospel through the apostle. How it witnesses to his own heart, and how we ought to be joyful in our own personal suffering as servants of Jesus Christ. The title of this morning's message is: 'The Joy of Suffering Service'. He's telling us in these verses that joy in suffering affects all our matters in Christian life, Christian service specifically, and even ought to penetrate and impact upon the fundamental issues of life and death.

Now I hope that you know, if you don't I'm going to tell you anyway, that joy is essential to serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Now when I talk about serving the Lord I'm not talking about what we speak of today as 'full-time

service', I'm talking about being saved and having a purpose given to us of God. Whatever we do for Christ, and I do trust today that you are doing something for Christ, and specifically doing something for Christ in the local church - the fact is the majority of you aren't, and that's why we're in so much difficulty to get people to do things in this assembly! But even those who are doing things often get discouraged, downhearted, even depressed, and fall by the wayside because they lose the joy of serving the Lord Jesus. It's so important that you have a joy even that transcends the difficulties of serving the Lord Jesus.

It was in Nehemiah 8 and verse 10 that we read: 'The joy of the Lord is your strength'. It is the same in serving the Lord, as Nehemiah was serving the Lord building the walls of Jerusalem, we as we are serving the Lord building up lively stones and putting them, hopefully, in the church of Jesus Christ, the joy of the Lord is our strength - and if we lose that joy we will lose strength, and we will fall. It's essential for serving the Lord, because the joy that we have in serving Him is based on the truth of what we believe in, and that truth that we put our joy upon gives us a great hope for a future joy that is yet to be that comes out of serving Christ, serving Him faithfully and eventually standing before the Bema, the judgement seat of Christ, and getting the reward for serving Him.

Well, Paul had that joy even in the prison cell, and in verse 19 he testifies of it: 'I know' - I know! It was a certainty to him. Oh, isn't it wonderful to know today that Christianity will triumph! It doesn't matter what the intellectuals and the religionists and the politicians and the kings of this world say, it doesn't matter what the media purports and divulges - an effulgence of filth and dirt into our society that is penetrating, making our society not a moral society, not even an immoral society, but an amoral society - without morals at all! But it doesn't matter, because Paul - even locked in a Roman prison cell - was able to say: 'I know that Christianity will triumph'. That brought the apostle great joy. If you remember last week that in spite of both the weaknesses of the proponents of Christianity, he's locked up in jail - the Philippians were afraid it seems - and in spite of the opposition of its opponents, those preaching Christ in contention, the gospel would triumph! Ultimately it would succeed because we don't keep the church, we don't keep the gospel, it is Christ who builds the church and it is Christ's Spirit that advances the gospel.

Oh, that should put iron into your bones right away. If you look at verse 6 that we spent much time on in chapter 1: 'Being confident', again there's his certainty, 'of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ'. He was confident, and it's wonderful to be confident in the sovereignty of a Holy God who has begun a work in us and will continue it, who has begun a work in embryo in the church of Jesus Christ at Pentecost, and will bring that church to triumph in glory. But we must voice some caution: although we believe in the sovereignty of God we find in verse 19 that there was also a responsibility upon men - and I keep saying this, I quote one of the great Scottish reformers when he said that: 'We do not believe in any form of God's sovereignty that nullifies man's responsibility'. God's sovereignty does not make us all into robots.

We see this in verse 19, because although in verse 6 Paul had said that God had begun a work, He'd instigated it and He would consummate it when he was standing before God in Christ, perfect in the likeness of Christ, although that is so and we can be sure because of God's sovereignty and God's choice in our lives - Paul was thanking these Philippians that his salvation would come through their prayers and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Now that does not mean that we are saved by the prayers of others, far from it - but Paul is saying this: from the moment that God saved him until the moment he stands before God in eternity, he would be, humanly speaking, relying on the prayers of the Philippians believers and also relying on the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ to get him there in the end. Do you see the balance? It is Christ's finished work, it is the work of the Holy Spirit in us that will get us to glory, but don't ever negate the responsibility that is on ourselves, and indeed the responsibility of the church where Christ has placed us, to help us along the way to get there.

Don't dilute the word 'salvation' in this verse 19, because salvation is not just a thing that happens to you on the night that you were converted, it's a past thing, it happened at Calvary. In fact, you can go further before the foundation of the world when the church was chosen in Christ, and then you go to Calvary where we were saved by the blood of Christ and His redemption, and then you move on to your conversion experience - but it's not just past, it's present now. We are being saved and sanctified and turned more and more into the image of Jesus, and there is a salvation yet to come - either when we're raptured and go to be with the Lord in the air, or when we die and our body goes to the grave and on the resurrection morn our bodies come out of the grave and spirit and soul are joined, and the redemption, the salvation of the body which is nearer now than when we first believed. Salvation has three aspects: past, present and future, but what Paul speaks of here is the future aspect - his deliverance one day that God would bring him to. But if God was going to bring him to it, along the way He would help him by the prayer of Christians and the power of the Spirit, that is what would sustain him on the way.

How important is the prayer meeting? It could be as important as you being on the way to glory! I hope you're there - it distresses me that there are some here, and I'm looking at your faces, and you are regularly absent from the prayer meeting - God forgive you! Do you realise that the lack of your prayers could be the reason why there are certain folk backslidden? I'm not saying that they aren't responsible, but could your prayers have helped them as it helped Paul while he was in prison to withstand temptation to deny the Lord? He wanted not to be ashamed on that day, and one of the strengthening aspects was the prayers of these believers.

Well, it helped him in his goal, and in verse 20 we read that he had an earnest expectation and a hope that in nothing he would be ashamed '...but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body'. He was absorbed with an earnest expectation, a goal - now that word 'earnest expectation' in the Greek language it's one word but it has three elements, the first element is the word 'away', the second element is the word 'the head', and the third element is the word 'to watch'. Now you put them altogether and this is the idea that it combines: watching something with the head turned away from all other objects - almost to be distracted, but to be distracted in an ordered way. In other words, he was ignoring everything else in life but this one earnest expectation, that he would get to the judgement seat of Christ and not be ashamed.

I feel condemned in my own heart already. Can I ask you this morning, we're not going to rush through this: are you occupied with one thing in life? And is that one thing how you will stand before Christ on the judgement day? It's not, I'll tell you why it's not: because this church would be on fire. To the exclusion of all other things, Hugh mentioned the verse speaking to the children, and he says and reiterates the sentiment in verse 13 of chapter 3: 'Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus'. Expend every effort as he runs and speeds toward the finishing tape, and if Paul needed that focus, do we not need that focus today? Do we not need the prayers of the saints? Do we not need the power of the Spirit? Oh, we're saved, and God who has begun a work in us will accomplish it, praise Him - but we are not exempt from the responsibility along the way!

It rebukes this attitude of those who just sit in the pew and drink up the sermons week after week after week, and never pray, never have a devotional time with the Lord, never have a walk or a witness! Where are you? God help you on that day. You'll be saved, but Paul says in Corinthians that you will be saved though as by fire - in other words, you will get in by the skin of your teeth. Well, through their prayers and through the Spirit's power there are several things that Paul knew that he would have even in prison. The first thing is this: the joy of not being ashamed of denial. He wanted in nothing that he would be ashamed, but with all boldness that he would always, so as now, Christ be magnified in his body. He's talking about the judgement seat, and he doesn't want to be ashamed when he gets there.

You see it preached today at times, you'd think it was some kind of School Prize Giving, where Jesus was going to give you a golden star and give you a pat on the back, and say: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant,

enter into the joy prepared by thy Lord'. You look at Revelation chapter 1, and you look at the fiery penetrating x-ray eyes of Jesus Christ the exalted Son of God, and you tell me that it will be a comfortable experience? John talked of it in his first epistle, chapter 2 verse 28: 'Little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming'. Paul was concerned that the believers pray for him, that the Spirit's supply would be given to him, because he didn't want on that day to be ashamed of the way he lived. Will you be ashamed on that day of the way that you've lived?

He didn't want to be ashamed of the way he had died. He wanted to die as a courageous soldier of Jesus Christ, he didn't want to be ashamed of the way he had suffered. What will be Christ's verdict of me? You know, that terrifies me: so much so that on the computer, several years ago I think it was, I got a big piece of white paper and I printed a little word in the middle of it: 'Bema' - and I stuck it on the wall. That's all that matters.

Paul's joy was that he would not be ashamed on that day, but the second thing that is really fundamental to these verses and the crux of them all is the joy of not being afraid of death. The joy of not being afraid of death. Now we heard from our brother Bill Freel not so long ago how important the body is, and everything that he said was absolutely correct. In Romans chapter 12 and verse 1 Paul exhorts us: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your expected worship'. It is expected, it's not a higher Christian life, it is expected of a believer to give the body over to the Saviour, to be a temple of the Holy Spirit - not in the intention to glorify the body, but in the intention that God would be glorified in the body. As one author has said, that the body should become the workshop of the Carpenter of Nazareth.

The body is like an earthly frame for the heavenly picture of the life of Jesus in us. Paul could say in another place that we are vessels of clay, that the priceless jewels and treasures of the life of God should be manifest in us. Paul wanted to magnify Christ in his body, and we are told to magnify Christ in our bodies. You know what a microscope is, you go into a scientific lab and you see this instrument that makes little things big - that's not what Christ is talking about through His Spirit in Paul. He's talking more about a telescope, a microscope makes little things big, but a telescope makes things that are really big loom big to you. Things perhaps that are at a distance, like the sun, the moon, or even a star, and they look like a little speck on the distant frame of the sky, but when you look through the telescope it becomes the likeness of what it really is. The Lord Jesus in His Spirit through Paul is telling us: 'I am distant many people's minds, in their sight they just cannot see Me', but if Christ is magnified in your body One who is bigger than the whole universe will loom the size that He really is - Christ magnified in our bodies.

That's our job. It is the sentiment of many of the Psalms: 'O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together'. Paul is saying: 'Whether in life or whether in death this is my one goal, this is my achievement, to magnify Christ in my body'. He is saying: 'I wish nothing else of myself, nothing'. He's expressing the sentiment of John the Baptist: 'He must increase and I must decrease, I must be eclipsed by God's Sun of Righteousness'. Do you know what happened to Paul's body? Paul's body died to Paul. People talk about the secret of the Christian life - I don't think there's just one secret, there are many secrets and they're all open within the word of God - but one of them is simply this: we have to die to ourselves. Paul's body was not a vehicle for him to live Paul's life through, but he realised that it had become sanctified by the blood of Christ as a vehicle to magnify the life of Christ in his body, whether through life or through death.

That's the reason why he had joy in not fearing death, his body was already dead to Paul! He wasn't trying to hold onto a life, he wasn't watching the life go through his fingers like water or like sand, and trying to grab hold of it again before it all disappeared. His life already was gone, Paul the apostle was dead to Paul, and that is why he could be killed. You know you can't kill a dead man, can you? He's already dead! He doesn't fear death, and you can't talk about a dead man - you can talk about him, but it doesn't affect him because he's dead to the opinions of other people. You can't offend him because he has no self to be offended. As one man said: 'If you've got no pride, it won't be hurt'.

Oh, do you see the secret to Paul not fearing death? It was the fact that he had nothing to lose - in fact, all that he had in death was to gain! 'For me to live is Christ, and I live as Christ as a dead man to Paul, but alive to Christ - and for me to die is gain, because then I will be actually dead and I'll still live on for Christ!'. What did he say in the book of Galatians? 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me'. Do you know what Paul was? You mightn't realise this, but he was locked up in prison, he had a Praetorian guard shackled to his arm, and you would look at him and pity him and think: 'I wish that man was free, because the Gospel would just explode in Europe if he was' - but Paul the apostle was the freest man in the world, the freest man in the world! Because he was dead to himself! The poet said:

I free myself from all belief
 That I am bound by pain or grief.
 The things that others do and say
 Erect no barriers in my way.
 All past mistakes I leave behind
 New courage, hope, and joy I find
 As I begin this day I free myself from lack of fear,
 The habits formed in yesteryear,
 Old grievances are laid away
 And with a hopeful heart I pray,
 That in my body soul and mind
 A worthy channel God will find
 To do His work this day'.

His joy was that he could not be killed because he was already dead! But there are three other aspects to Paul's view of death that I want to share with you just as we close our meeting today. His joy in not being afraid of death is found in verse 20, because Christ is exalted in death as well as in life. The second part: '[so that] Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death'. You know, Paul was exalting Christ in his life - I think you all would agree with me there - but you know, never forget that the words that we read are the words of a Christian martyr.

James the apostle is the only apostle that we read of as a martyr, and how he died as a martyr. We know from tradition, at least we believe from tradition, that all the apostles were martyred. Tradition tells us that James the brother of John was slain by Herod's sword; it tells us that Philip crucified in Hierapolis in Phrygia; James the Lest was clubbed to death in Jerusalem; we read of Andrew that he was crucified at a place called Odessa; we read of Thomas that he was thrust through with a spear in India. Tradition tells us that Simon the Zealot was crucified; Thaddeus was crucified at Odessa again; Bartholomew was beaten and crucified in India; Peter the apostle was crucified in Rome - and tradition tells us that he was crucified, by request, upside-down because he felt that he was unworthy to die in the same way as his Lord. John, exiled to Patmos, from whom we have the book of the Revelation, it's believed that he was horribly martyred by being cast into a pot of boiling oil. Matthew was beheaded in Ethiopia, Paul beheaded in Rome - all of them dying for Christ, why? Because they couldn't be killed, they were dead already!

They were succeeded by a glorious succession of heroes like the Huguenots, the Covenanters, the Reformers - we could go on and on, and people even dying for their faith today as we speak in the church worldwide at large - but they were already martyrs, that's what I want you to see! They were already martyrs! Not that they died outwardly, but they had died inwardly - and when you've died inwardly then it's not a problem to die outwardly! Oh, I love that hymn, and you would know because I never stop getting you to sing it, 722: 'Make me a captive, Lord'. Paul in prison asking:

'Make me a captive, Lord,
Then I shall be free.
Force me to render up my sword,
And I shall conqueror be.

I sink in life's alarms
When by myself I stand,
Imprison me within Thine arms
And strong shall be my hand!'

He had joy in not fearing death because Christ was exalted in his death as well as in his life, but secondly in verse 21: because life means opportunities, but death means gain. Life means opportunities, but death means gain: 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain'. If Paul lived he knew that his ministry and his mission would be fruitful, and that fruit would go to his reward in eternity. If he lived on he would use all the opportunities he had, but do you know what I find here, a principle: that life for Paul was labour, and death for Paul was rest. Life was labour, and eternity was rest. Listen now: there was no retirement for Paul the apostle! There was no sitting about waiting for God: to live was to labour. That's why he told the Corinthians: 'Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord'.

Now in Rome death was the king of terrors, under the Jewish law death was seen as the penalty for transgressing the law, the judgement of God. But as Paul looks at death he doesn't see it as a terror, he doesn't see it as a penalty of the law, but he sees himself not entering into Abraham's bosom like the Old Testament saints, but entering directly into the actual presence of Jesus Christ to be with Christ, his body awaiting resurrection! Is that the way you think of death? Do you think of death as gain? That's what it is, I know it's hard to think of it that way, but Paul says that it's the final consummation of the whole progression of sanctification that was begun in your salvation. In life Paul was totally consecrated to Christ, and in death he expects to totally possess Christ. If I can read a paraphrase of that verse: 'Life means Christ to me, as I more fully know and love and serve Him day by day; death means Christ to me, when I shall finally possess and eternally enjoy Him'.

Death for him was certainty, it wasn't uncertainty. It was a conscious existence, not an unconscious oblivion. It was to be with Christ, not to just be in a grave. It was very much far better, not a dreadful or a tragic thing. It was a part of life, not a conclusion or a finish of life. It was a beginning, not an ending. It was a commencement, not a ceasing - it was life on a grander scale! He could joy not fearing death because Christ is exalted in death as well as in life, because life means opportunities but death is gain - and can I say to you that this gave Paul the apostle a terrible dilemma, a terrible dilemma. Do you know it gives you a terrible dilemma too?

What was his dilemma? His dilemma was this: what will I choose? If life is good because it's Christ, and if death is gain because I'm with Christ, which will I choose? Which would you choose? Paul says: 'I am hard pressed between the two' - would you be hard pressed between the two? I think not! If I was to ask you this morning: which is the selfish answer, to die or to live? Which is the selfish one? You would probably say: 'Well, to live is the selfish one, isn't that right?'. To live and to keep your life, to not go to be with Christ, to not go to your reward - do you know what Paul says? 'No! The selfish one for me is to die. The selfish one is to go to be with Christ, because I'm needed down here, and I know that when I get up there it will be joy, it will be reward, it will be peace in the presence of Christ!'. Can I say that that, if anything, rebukes an attitude that sometimes we have toward the second coming of the Lord Jesus: the endtimes, the Lord's coming soon, all these things are coming on the stage of prophecy, and we sit idle and let people go to hell because Jesus is near!

I believe He's near, I believe prophecy, but sometimes the privilege of dabbling in our prophetic crystal ball is taken from us because of the awesome responsibility that there is now! It is more needful that I abide in the flesh!

There is much, Paul says, that needs to be done, and he was willing to forget all his own enjoyment in heaven for what was necessary. But he says, he confesses: 'My real desire is to depart'. 'It's a difficult choice', he's saying, 'I want, really, to depart, but it's more necessary for me to stay'. We in the West still see death as a terror, don't we? Society's highest goal is to prolong life, the postponement of death for as long as is medically and physically possible. We're obsessed with physical life as it is in our bodies, the church is obsessed with the here and now, with materials and with comfort - and our comfort in this life is in life, in living! But Paul's comfort was in dying. Our pain is in death, but Paul's pain was in living.

Almost every principle in these verses, and we haven't finished them and neither are we going to this morning, but almost every one of them challenges the Western perception of the Christian life. People today are becoming more individualistic, Paul was saying here: 'You need to depend upon one another's prayers, and depend upon the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ'. He challenges our complacency because we are saved and we're on our way to glory, eternal security that denies the perseverance that we need, as he will say later, to make our calling and our election sure! It challenges our comfort! He tells us: 'Comfort is never a priority in the Christian pilgrimage!'. He challenges the theme of our prayers, listen to them: 'Lord, heal so-and-so; Lord, dull their pain; Lord, give them money; Lord, give them food'. I don't say that those prayers are wrong, but often they are from selfish motivation because we know that we don't want to feel pain, we know that we don't want to hunger, we don't want to be naked, we don't want to die - but Paul could say: 'It is very much far better'.

We must leave it there, but can I ask you: if God whispered into your ear now, which is it for you? To live, or to die? Which would it be?

Let us pray, you know what perhaps one of the greatest fears that I have is? Not being poor now, not being unknown now, not being a failure now; but being poor, a failure, and unknown at the judgement seat. Oh, I know His grace will cover it all, no doubt about it, but I want to give to Him as much as I can - and now is the time! Friends, some of you haven't got long - I say it lovingly, compassionately from my heart - some of you are wasting away your lives and you couldn't care less! Paul says forget the past, redeem the time, and with what is left press on.

Father, our power is faint and low till we have learned to serve, we want the needed fire to glow, we want the breeze to nerve; it cannot drive the world until itself be driven, its flag can only be unfurled when Thou shalt breathe from heaven. Breathe upon us, Lord, and help us to present our bodies today, our body, soul and spirit to Thee as a sacrifice. Lord, let us be fools for Christ today, that we will not be fools in eternity. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 7

"The Joy of Suffering Service - Part 2"

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Philippians 1:18-26

Philippians chapter 1, and if you remember - I'm sure you can't remember - the last time I was here on a Sunday morning, the last time we were ministering on these verses the subject was 'The Joy of Suffering Service', and we didn't have time to finish that study, so we're finishing it off this morning. We'll begin reading at verse 18 right through to verse 26, so it's the second part of 'The Joy of Suffering Service'.

"What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you".

I don't know whether you know the gospel hymn, and many of these new Southern Gospel groups - not so much new, but they're new to us, as we get these Gaither videos and records and CDs and all the rest - one of the songs that they sing that has touched my heart in recent days is:

'The longer I serve Him,
The sweeter He grows.
The more that I love Him,
More love He bestows.
Each day is like heaven,
My heart overflows:
The longer I serve Him,
The sweeter He grows'.

It's beautiful words, and it's set to a beautiful tune, and of course they sing it beautifully - but I wonder is that our experience as we serve the Lord Jesus Christ? As Tozer has said, and I often say it: 'Christians don't tell lies, they just sing them'. Do we sing things that we really don't know as an experience in our lives? Can we say that the longer we serve the Lord Jesus the sweeter He grows? The more we love Him, more love He bestows? Each day in serving Him is like heaven, and our hearts overflow? Can we say that?

The answer that we may give is: 'No, we can't say that', because, as we have served the Lord, difficulties have come along our path - we've been disappointed and dejected, we've been hurt by other Christians, perhaps people that we've been working with. There has been a bitterness that has entered into our service for the Lord, and the joy of the service that we gave to Christ that we once knew has disappeared in the midst of sorrow and trial, heartache, distress, maybe even temptation and falling into sin. Well friends, I want you to see very clearly today that Paul went through more difficulties, more trials and tribulations and testing and temptations, than perhaps any of us or all of us will ever go through - but Paul was able to testify in a most wonderful way that he

knew the joy of God deep down in his heart, that is the joy that passeth all understanding, that peace that transcends all the storms and all the difficulties, and it was rooted deep down in his heart as an anchor that even sheltered in the storms.

We know that because he rejoiced in the very fact that through his sufferings the gospel was being advanced, through what he was going through in prison, not only through the encouragement that it was to the church in Philippi - and they were encouraged through Paul's witness to go out and spread the gospel - but those centurions that were coming, those soldiers from the Praetorian guard that were chained to Paul on a daily basis, were hearing the gospel on a one-to-one capacity. They were going back to the camp, to the Praetoria, and they were witnessing to what was going on - and we know that many in the whole city of Rome were converted through this great witness of Paul in the midst of trial and heartache and in his problems.

We found in the last study that we looked at that Paul enters now, in verses 18 to 26, to talk about how his suffering in service has affected him personally, how it has affected his personal salvation, and he actually uses that word in verse 19: 'For I know that this shall turn out to my salvation through your prayer'. Now what does that mean? That Paul didn't know whether he was saved or not, he didn't know whether he was going to heaven, whether he was born again? That's not what it means! Paul was sure, he said in another place: 'I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day'. We have the teaching and the doctrine of eternal security through the apostle Paul more than any other teacher of the Word of God, especially in the great epistle of the Romans. That's not that this means, but when we understand that salvation is a past experience, a present experience, and a future experience - we have been saved, but we are continually being saved on a daily basis as God sanctifies us more and more, and one day we will realise our full salvation when our old bodies will be redeemed, and when body, soul and spirit will be united together again, and we'll be taken up to be with the Lord Jesus Christ in glory - that's what the apostle means when he says that our salvation is nearer today than the hour we first believed.

Well, we saw that what got Paul through all these difficulties was twofold: there was the sovereignty of God, the Spirit, the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ in verse 19; but there was also their prayers, and it's so important that we realise that if we are going to get to glory one day and stand before the Lord Jesus Christ blameless and not be ashamed of what we've done for Christ, one: we must rely on God's power, the power of His Spirit in our life; but also we need the prayers of our brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, because he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and because the church at Philippi and other churches were praying fervently for the apostle Paul, he was given by God - verse 20 - an earnest expectation and hope. He was given a desire, an earnest expectation and hope - and we looked at the Greek word and we found that it's made up of three elements. It's the combined idea, if I can translate it like this: watching for something with the head turned away from other objects. Watching for something, and being only occupied with that thing to the exclusion and the ignorance of anything else. In other words, Paul had a goal, and he would let nothing else in his life detract him or distract him from his one goal.

Now mark: it was given by the Spirit of God, and it was realised by the prayer of God's people. He expresses that goal, doesn't he, in chapter 3 and verse 13: 'Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do' - there it is, to the exclusion of all other things - 'forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press', and the picture is of the neck of a horse racing, stretching over the finishing line for the win, 'I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus'. Now here is a man, and I want you to mark it well because you'll not see too many men and women like this in the day and age we live in, here is a man who is expending all his strengths, all his energies, all the wealth of the riches that God's Holy Spirit has given to him, and all the very prayers of the saints for one goal: that he may be honoured of God on the day when he is resurrected out of the grave, and he stands before Jesus Christ as his Judge.

Paul knew that what would give him joy, more than anything else in his service, was to know that on that day he would not be ashamed - isn't that right? That he would never be ashamed of denying the Lord Jesus, he says it: 'In nothing', verse 20, 'I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death' - that whatever he would suffer in that prison, if he would ever be tortured again, if he would ever be stoned and left for dead, or left shipwrecked, that he would never deny the Lord! No matter what hardships, pains, trials, disappointments and let-downs he would have, that he would never turn his back on the Lord Jesus.

My friend, I know, I know how hard it is to work for the Lord at times. I know how hard it is at times to take from God's people what you have to take, but I hope to God I never deny the Lord and turn my back upon His work. I wonder is there someone here today, and you've been made bitter by something that someone else has done, by a heartache, by a trial - maybe you're accusing God of letting you down, and you've given up so much for Him, and you've tried to do so much, and He's brought an illness or a sickness or some other problem into your life, into your family. I'm asking you today, not in the light of what you're going through today, not in the light of what this other brother or sister has done toward you, but in the light of those eyes that are as blazing fire of the Son of God, that will look into the depths of your being at the judgement seat of Christ and will burn up everything that is not of God and is of the flesh and of self and sin, in the light of that I'm asking you: will you be ashamed on that day? I hope you're not, because you'll wish you could put back time and undo everything that you've done, and you'll wish you had given Him more.

Paul knew also that his joy in service would depend upon not being afraid of death. In life or death he hoped that Christ would be magnified in his body, in other words if he was caused to suffer in life that he would suffer without denying Christ, and if he was caused to die for Christ that he would die with dignity and honour for Christ. He goes on to say this tremendous statement: 'For to me to live is Christ, but to die is gain'. He wanted nothing in life or in death but Christ!

I don't know whether I'm going to get through all this today, because these statements are worth stopping for a moment and pondering. Is all that we want in life or in death Jesus Christ? Is that all that matters to the exclusion of all other things and occupations? It wouldn't be hard to test. I don't believe attendance to meetings is a thermometer of your spirituality, you could be coming to meetings and be as dead as a dodo - but I'll tell you this, if you're not with God's people there's something wrong. If you can miss a Sunday evening or a Sunday morning, and go out for the day for a picnic, or your own recreation, there's something wrong. Is He the pre-eminent One? The Baptist could say: 'He must increase, I must decrease'.

We found out, and this is what I want to bring back to your remembrance, because it outflows in everything else that we're going to have to say today: the reason why Paul was in this state and attitude and disposition, that for him to live and suffer was Christ, and to die was gain, was because Paul was already on the cross! Paul had already been crucified, Paul had already been killed! 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; but it is not I that live, but Christ that liveth in me. And the life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me'. The reason why Paul could suffer, and that Paul could die, and do it all with joy, was because Paul was already dead.

This is where the rubber hits the road, and if you want any secret to the Christian life this is it: to know that there are two crosses. There is the cross on which the Lord Jesus died, and bore your sin; but the other cross on which you must die. Roy Hession talked about it in his book 'The Calvary Road', some of you have bought it in the Bible Reading not so long ago, I hope you've read it - but he quotes a little verse that I often quote in prayer: 'Lord, bend that stiff-necked I, help me to bow the head and die, beholding Him on Calvary who bowed His head for me'.

I know we've been to Calvary for the cleansing blood, that's not what I'm asking you, I'm asking you: have you been to Calvary and seen your own body on that cross? For until you get to that position, you'll never suffer

with joy, and even die with joy as Paul did - for he could say life means Christ to me, and as I more fully know and love and serve Him day by day; death means Christ to me, when I shall finally possess and eternally enjoy Him. It's far better! It's not a tragedy to die for Paul, because he was already dead - and because of that he had a dilemma! 'I'm caught betwixt these two choices, I'm in a strait between two: I have a desire to depart to be with Christ, which is far better, but I know that you need me - what will I do?'. Boys-a-dear, if you asked me that question I know what I'd do - I'd be staying! Wouldn't you?

I asked you, and I'll ask you again for it's important - and don't think that I have no message this morning, and I'm just going over the last one, I want you to remember it! If I was to ask you what is the selfish choice, staying on earth or going to heaven, what would you say? You would say: 'Staying on earth, that's the selfish choice' - that wasn't the selfish choice with Paul, his selfish choice was going to heaven because his treasure, his life was in heaven, because he believed Jesus who said that those who lose their life will find it again! That's why it was selfish for him to go and get his reward, and he chose the unselfish choice which was to stay with the Philippians because it was more needful for them - he was able to forget his own enjoyment. Didn't we see at the very outset of the study of this epistle that this is what this book is all about: setting aside yourself, you, I, me, and mine, me and my four and no more - setting all that aside, humbling yourself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross - isn't that what it is? Let this mind be in you, which is also in Christ Jesus - that will bring you joy.

Now, we have to stop and ponder Paul's view of death for a moment, because this is very important. Paul's view of death is essentially the Christian view of death, and this is why he was not afraid of it. Now, you look at these verses, he talked about going to be with Christ in various ways in many of his epistles. One phrase he says: 'To depart and be with Christ is far better', and he uses picture language and illustration, and the first one is this: 'to depart'. The illustration here is threefold - one is of the dissolution of a chemical, that's what this word means in the Greek, to dissolve a chemical. If you go home and you get a headache after listening to me for half an hour this morning, and you get one of those big tablets - incidentally, I was in Scotland not so long ago, and you'll like this one: this lady was at a dinner and she had a real problem with a headache that particular morning, and she hadn't any panadol or paracetamol on her, so she asked for one - and a lady give her one of these big ones. She took a glass of water, and she popped it in her mouth and she swallowed it, and about 10 minutes into the dinner she was foaming at the mouth - and they had her on the floor going to give her CPR and everything, I think they thought she was demon possessed - so don't be doing that. When you drop it into the water, what do you see? You see the tablet beginning to dissolve, and it literally disappears, doesn't it? It disappears, but it's there, the substance is still there but you just can't see it. Paul is saying that that's what death for the Christian is, they disappear, you no longer see their visage that you've known for so long, but they're still there. It's a dissolving, they don't cease to exist.

How many atheists in our day don't believe in the resurrection? I was reading yesterday, and I've forgotten the chemical that it is, but one man on one occasion asked an atheist: 'If I drop this big lump of silver into this chemical would it dissolve? Is that not a seeming impossibility?'. And whatever chemical it was, the silver did dissolve - but he said to the atheist: 'You're not going to tell me that the silver is not there?', and he had to admit: 'You're right, the silver is there'. Apparently when you put salt water into this particular chemical, that which has dissolved comes together again in one big clump of unrecognisable silver, and then the silversmith comes along with his hammer and makes a new creation out of it!

We only have to look to nature, don't we? We see those branches on the trees at this time of year that are almost hollow, when you hit them you can hear that hollow noise off them, they're dead - there's no leaves or buds coming from it, it's all brown and black and dead, but there is a day coming in springtime when it will bud forth new life, and the whole of creation praises God for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the Prince of life! Isn't He? Well, this Greek word can be used as well for the lifting of an anchor, to depart - to lift an anchor. In other words, to move from one shore on to another. What happens when you leave the shore? It's what's called an

horizon, and it says 'thus far and no further' - and you can't see when that ship goes over the horizon, and goes down the globe, it seems to have disappeared, but you and I both know that it hasn't disappeared. We can't see it, we can't hear it, but we know that the anchor is being set down on another shore.

The third usage of this word 'to depart' and be with Christ is used of the striking of a tent, a journey after sleep. In other words, when you rise and take the tent pegs out, and you pull the tent down and fold it up and put it on your camel, and you go further. Paul talks about this in Corinthians, where he says: 'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; and for this we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven'. Do we groan for that? Do you see how Paul talks about the leaving? The dissolution of a chemical, the lifting of an anchor, the striking of a tent. Guy King said: 'The storm-tossed mariner sailing away in his last ocean voyage, to the haven where he would be; the battle-scarred warrior, marching away off the field of war for his sovereign review', when the Christian dies all the uncertainties of danger and life are ended, and they're left behind - and there is this leaving of this world, but praise God it's not just a leaving, but it's a receiving!

What do I mean? For to depart and be with Christ is far better, very much far better - it is to be with Christ. We're with Him now, aren't we, with His Spirit by fellowship? Day by day we feel His presence, even this morning, but this is more than just a relationship that we have now, but the relationship of further intimacy that is still awaiting us in glory - which is immeasurably far better than down here. There's times when we're in fellowship with the Lord, and we feel we could almost reach out and touch the Lord, we feel we could feel Him - the sense of His presence and His power. But friends, what will it be like when we see Him face-to-face - it is immeasurably far better! It is the best by far, Paul says. If you could see this giant of faith, imagine what he was like in prison: all the church is worried about him and praying for him, and he thinks perhaps he's going to be executed - that was a distinct possibility at the start, although it didn't happen, and then eventually he knew it wouldn't happen, as he says here it was necessary for him to stay, but he didn't know that at the beginning, and they didn't know it. They thought he was going to die, they don't know what tortures he's going through, and perhaps they were sitting in their church, and by the side of their lovely comfortable fire, saying: 'Oh, poor Paul, poor Paul'. My friend, he didn't see himself as poor, he saw himself as immeasurably rich - if he was to suffer for Christ it would be wonderful; and if he was to die, well, then it would be gain.

How do we view death? We live in a society, in this Western materialism in which we live, it stifles this Christian spirit of God's people dying well. We don't have a dilemma before us about whether to go and be with Christ or stay - there's no dilemma at all, we just want to stay for as long as we can! We put as many pills in us - and I have to watch what I say - but we run and do exercises, eat healthy and all the rest, to try and stay on this earth as long as possible...but you know, Paul is urging us to selflessness in our suffering. I'll tell you, we could take a good leaf out of the book of the people across our world who are suffering in the persecuted church, and last Sunday was the international day of prayer for the persecuted church.

I read recently about an Iranian believer who learned Paul's perspective on death and suffering, and what a lesson it provides for us in the West today. His name is Medi Dija, I can hardly pronounce his name, but he was imprisoned by the Iranian government in 1984 on charges of apostasy, simply because he believed in the Lord Jesus and had converted from Islam to Christianity. The penalty for that crime of apostasy, according to Islamic law, was death. This man languished in prison for 10 years before his case came trial, and when it did his written statement of defence was a simple straightforward reaffirmation of his commitment to Jesus Christ. This is the last few lines of his defence, and I want you to hear it and see the similarity with Paul: 'Jesus Christ is our Saviour, and He is the Son of God. To know Him means to know eternal life. I, a useless sinner, have believed in His beloved Person and all His words and miracles recorded in the Gospel, and I have committed my life into His hands. Life for me is an opportunity to serve Him, and death is a better opportunity to be with Him. Therefore I am not only satisfied to be in prison for the honour of His holy name, but I am ready to give my life for the sake of Jesus my Lord'. On December the 12th 1993, the court before whom his defence was made

sentenced him to execution, and then under intense pressure from the West including the US State Department, the Iranian government arranged his release in January 1994. Seven months later he was found dead under suspicious circumstances in a Tehran park, the third Christian to be murdered in Iran after his release from prison. Most people believe the government was compliant in his death.

But friends, he got his wish, didn't he? Do we see it like that? John and Betty Stam are martyred by the Communists in China, and before Betty is put to death she's holding that baby in her arms, and she literally watches her own beloved husband beheaded before her eyes. She's asked: 'Are you afraid?'. She says: 'Afraid? Afraid of what? Afraid to do by death what our life couldn't do?'. She stood and was beheaded, and the baby fell into the dust - and the two of them united in eternity. My friend, if you want to never be ashamed at the judgement seat, if you want never to be afraid of death just like Paul, you need to allow the Holy Spirit to put you to death now, be a martyr for Christ now in the spirit, and then you will never be afraid and you will be given the spirit to persevere and not be ashamed. Babcock the poet put it like this:

'Why be afraid of death
As though your life were breath?
Death but anoints your eyes
With clay, oh glad surprise!

Why should you be forlorn?
Death only husks the corn.
Why should you fear to meet
The Thresher of the wheat?

Is sleep a thing to dread?
Yet, sleeping, you are dead
Till you awake and rise
Here, or beyond the skies.

Why should it be a wrench
To leave yon wooden bench?
Why not with happy shout
Run home when school is out?

Dear ones left behind,
Oh foolish one, and blind!
A day and you will meet,
A night and you will greet.

This is the death of death:
To breathe away a breath,
And know the end of strife,
And taste the deathless life,

And joy without a fear,
And smile without a tear,
And work nor care to rest,
And find the last is best!

Can you give it all over to God? My friend, Paul chose the choice of staying for it was far better for his friends. Now here's the test now, I want you to get this in our closing couple of minutes, here's the test whether your life has been hid with Christ in God and put to death, and you're not living for self any more but you're living for Christ and for His glory, whether He be magnified in your body by life or by death. Here it is: are you

convinced of your purpose on earth? It was needful for Paul to stay for these Christians, what is God's chosen work for you now? Have you any reason to stay? I hear people saying to me: 'The Lord hasn't called me yet, so He must have something for me to do' - do you know what I think most of the time? He's still waiting for the thing to be done that He told you to do 30 years ago! Are you doing something for the Lord, that He would have to say: 'I can't take him home now, he's too valuable to me'?

Are you convinced of your purpose on earth? Here's the next question: does your Christianity bring progress to others? 'Having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith' - do you bring joy to other people, or are you a pain in the neck to other people? Third question: do you cause others plenteous joy, joy to abound? When people think of you, when people think of me, does their joy abound for what I do for them in Christ? Can you give it all over to Him today? That's what's needed.

When W.E. Sangster was asked by a mother who was heartbroken on one occasion because her daughter was going to go through an eye operation, and if the operation failed she would be blinded for the rest of her life. The little girl said: 'Oh, I believe that God's going to take my sight away' - and W.E. Sangster, after being asked by her mother to speak to the little girl, said: 'Jessie, I wouldn't let Him do that if I were you'. She looked at him confused, and she said: 'What do you mean? Do what? Take my sight away? Do you think I could stop God taking my sight away?'. He begged her, and he asked her if she thought that in three weeks or a month she could pray a prayer like this: 'Father, if for any reason known to Thee I must lose my sight, I will not let it be taken from me' - but here's the key - 'I will give it to Thee'.

That's when the joy comes into service. She said initially that she couldn't live without her sight, but in three weeks she was able to pray this prayer, and as she gradually lost the glimmer of light in her cortex, she was able to give it all up to God. With that prayer came the peace of God, and the power of God. Is there something you're holding onto? Something you're afraid that God will take away from you? Will you let it go? Then you will know the peace and the power of the joy of serving Him.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the great love of the Lord Jesus and the humility, how He could say: 'I am among you as one that serveth'. How He, as the God of all heaven, put aside self, even though He didn't have self, but He could have grasped at the privileges of His deity - but He did not. He came and became a servant of no reputation. Father, let this mind be in us as we serve Thee, let us put aside our petty differences and proud selfishnesses, and let us serve one another without getting gain, but serve Thee for Thy sake - that on that day we would not be ashamed. Lord, we pray that Thou wilt restore the joy of salvation to those who have lost it, and that You would give us all, in the days that lie ahead, the joy of serving Him. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 8

"The Marks Of A Spiritual Church - Part 1"

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by Pastor David Legge
Philippians 1:27-30

Now we're turning in our New Testaments to Paul's epistle to the Philippians chapter 1, and our subject title today is: 'The Marks of a Good Church', or if you like 'The Marks of a Spiritual Church', because that's what we mean when we say a good church. We don't mean a big church numerically, we don't even mean a very talented church with regards to the gifts that God has given to us, or perhaps just the natural gifts that we have been given by the natural process of nature, whether it be music or oratory or anything like that - that's not what we're talking about, but we're talking about the marks of a spiritually good church. We find that Paul outlines this for us in these verses that we read today, chapter 1 verses 27 to verse 30.

Now, you remember that Paul has been talking about how he will be victorious in death if he is called to die. Just for your context, maybe this is your first time here, let me just give you a bit of a background: Paul is writing this little letter from a prison, that's very important to know. He's suffering for the Lord Jesus, and he's been describing how he has got great joy in his heart - not the happiness of this world that is rooted and grounded in the foundation of circumstances and things going well for you that makes you happy, but a joy that is rooted and grounded, and even shields from the storms of the difficulties of life, that transcends the problems of life - the Bible calls it a peace that passes all understanding, that even when things are going difficult, even when you're in prison like Paul is here, you're joyous and there is a deep satisfaction and peace in your heart.

So Paul has been talking about if he dies, well, he's happy with that; and if he lives, well, he's happy also with that. We'll read from verse 21 just to get the context for you: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" - for the Christian to die, to depart and be with Christ, is far better than life down here... 'for I am in a strait'...he doesn't know what to choose! Verse 24: "Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith". It's not my time to go yet, I still have a work to do, and my work is for you that your joy might abound. Verse 26: "That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again". Now here we come to the verses we're looking at today: "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me".

It's not hard to tell from the reading of this portion of Scripture this morning that there is a war on. As far as Paul the apostle is concerned, writing to these Christians in Philippi, he wants them to realise that there is a spiritual war on. Just look at the language from verses 27 to 30, you see he talks about standing fast, striving together, your adversaries or your enemies, and then he talks in verse 30 about the conflict that we're all in. Now, he's not talking about a physical war, and the hymns of Christian battle that we've been singing already today are not talking about the warfare of this world in the flesh. Paul says in another place that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but they are spiritual - we are in a spiritual war.

Now, as you look to some Christians, and maybe even at some Christian churches, you wouldn't think it to look at them - it seems that Christianity is more like a picnic, an airy-fairy happy fairy tale, pie-in-the-sky-when-you-

die, not a battle or a real bloody spiritual battle that is expending all our energies and all our strengths, and that we are even perhaps being pushed to the point of shedding blood for down here on earth! Yet Paul says, and the Word of God categorically right throughout the Scriptures tells us, that the Christian life is not a picnic, it's not a playground, but it is a battleground.

Now we might be pushed to ask the question: 'Well, if it is a battleground, what is at stake in this battle?'. Paul tells us at the end of verse 27: 'We are striving together for the faith of the gospel', that is what we are to fight for as Christians in this world. Our battle is under the banner of the cross of the Lord Jesus, our chief fundamental fight with the world and with the spiritual realm is over the gospel, the truth of God, of how that we are saved from our sins because Jesus Christ is come into the world to be the Saviour of sinners - He has come to seek and to save that which is lost. That is the message that this world hates, that is the message that this world system, the philosophies and ideologies and even the theologies of this world are all opposed to in their antichrist nature, it is the gospel. That is what we are called as the church to defend.

If you turn, you don't have to, to Jude verse 3, you find that Jude says there: 'Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation', the gospel, 'it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints'. He says: 'Christians, you've to fight for the gospel' - not fight with flesh and blood, or fisticuffs or with arms, but there's a spiritual battle that you're in, and this world, false religions and cults and philosophies and the doctrines of demons, are all out to contradict and pull down the message of the gospel. It is your job as the Christian church and as individual Christian soldiers to defend, to contend, and to fight for the gospel.

Let me show you how this is the case, and how Paul outlines to us that we are in this battle. If you turn to the epistle of 1 Timothy, Paul is writing to Timothy, chapter 4 and verse 1. He warns Timothy that there's going to be a day coming when the gospel will be at stake, when this world will get to such an evil extent that it will pull the gospel apart, that it will not even be recognisable in some quarters. For this reason he's to hold it fast, verse 1: 'Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith' - there it is again, the faith once delivered to the saints - 'giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils', the doctrines of demons.

Let's just pause for a minute, because I want us all to understand what we're talking about here: we're talking about churches and organisations that tell us today that as long as you're sincere, and as long as you're seeking after God in some nebulous shape and form, God will have mercy on you, God will forgive you of your sin, and God will take you to heaven one day. We live today in what is called a 'PC' age, and that's not a Personal Computer, but Political Correctness. You're no longer able to talk, as it were, in public about absolutes, that something is absolutely right and something is absolutely wrong, something is black-and-white. We seem to live in this morass of greyness, and we're not allowed to say someone's right or someone's wrong. They're maybe only wrong where we're concerned, but they can't be said to be wrong where they're concerned. There is this relativism, it might be wrong for you, but it might be right for them.

Friends, the gospel does not fit into that environment of political correctness, do you know why? Because the Bible says it is once delivered to the saints, that means the Gospel that the apostles gave to the saints in the beginning is the same gospel today, and it does not change! It cannot change because it was given by God to the apostles, the apostles then gave it to the Christians, and the Christians down all the age of Christian history have been passing it on. Now, here's the danger: that we believe the doctrines of devils that men are teaching today, that there's no difference between Catholicism and biblical Christianity, that there's no difference between the god of Islam and the god of Buddhism, or the god of the Jehovah's Witnesses, or the way of the Mormons - that it's all the same way...it is not the same way! The gospel of the Bible is the gospel that God delivered to the apostles, and that is the gospel that we are to fight for and to contend for and defend today.

Let me show you that that is the pattern that we have in the Word of God, and this is very important. If you turn to 1 Timothy that you're in, chapter 1 and verse 11, Paul tells us how this gospel was delivered unto the apostles: 'According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God', this is from God, it's not out of the mind and imagination of men, 'which was committed to my trust'. If you like, God trusted Paul and gave him the gospel to give it unto other people. Now, here's the pattern, you move on to chapter 6 of Timothy and verse 20, Paul has committed the gospel of God to him, and then in verse 20 he says: 'O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called'. Do you see the pattern now? God gave it to Paul, trusted Paul to give it to others; so Paul gives it to Timothy, and trusts Timothy to give it to others also.

You move on to 2 Timothy chapter 2, we see the pattern again, 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 2: 'And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also'. God gives His gospel through the Lord Jesus Christ, He commits the message of the gospel to the apostles - specifically here Paul - Paul is given the responsibility of committing the gospel to others, so he gives it to Timothy, and he tells Timothy: 'Now, you give that gospel that I've committed to you, into your trust, to faithful men who can also be trusted to give it unto others - not diluting the gospel, not changing the gospel, but giving the gospel in all of its essence and in all of its pureness'.

Now let me just say that this is why teaching in the local church is so important. This is why the teaching in the local church is important: to preserve the gospel of Christ, to preserve the faith that was once delivered unto the saints - and that's why we need as believers on a regular basis to get around the Word of God and to learn what the Word of God says, that's why we have a Bible Reading on a Monday evening. It gives us time, an hour or so, to get around the word of God and to understand the faith that is once delivered to the saints. Now you need to realise that we're in a battle, and that means this: that the enemy of our souls wants to rob us of the faith once delivered to the saints. He wants it to be changed, he wants it to be diluted, he wants to take away from the believer, cripple the believer, defeat the believer by losing the truth. Ultimately what we will lose, if we lose the truth, is the gospel ministry and the impact of the gospel to the world around us.

Now listen: if we want the gospel to have the greatest impact in this district around us, we need to contend for and protect the deposit of the gospel that has been given to us by God. The way we do that is not only preaching the gospel outwardly, but learning the gospel inwardly and studying the word of God together. Someone has rightly said that the church is only one generation off potential extinction. I believe that the Lord Jesus will build His church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, but let me tell you this on a human level: if we are not teaching our young people, if we are not teaching our middle-aged people the gospel, or if they are not learning the gospel because they are absent from the Bible Reading, from Sunday mornings, from Sunday evenings, we will lose, we will lose the deposit of the gospel! Now I'm telling you this! And I'll give you an illustration: there are so-called Evangelical churches around in our land at this present time, and they are so confused about what the gospel is because they have never been taught the gospel for a long time in all of its pureness and simplicity and unadulterated nature, that they are now confusing the gospel of the Bible with the gospel of the Roman Catholic Church! They are having priests in the pulpit committing themselves to the church, Evangelical churches, as brothers and sisters in Christ. Now we love these dear Roman Catholic people, we love people of all religions and all types, but we do not confuse what the gospel is - we can't do that, it's too important! It's been given by God to Paul, and by Paul to Timothy, and by Timothy to faithful men who would preserve the gospel, and it's been given to us - and I'm telling you, young people, if you're not at the Bible Reading you will not learn what the gospel is! There may come a day, like there is in some of the churches in our land, when they are so confused about the gospel that they are believing a false gospel of the devil!

You might think that very harsh, but let me tell you what Paul said: 'If any man come unto you, even an angel come unto you and preach a gospel that is not the gospel of Jesus, they are preaching another Christ that is not the same Christ as the Bible - let him be cursed', Paul says! Is that because Paul is a harsh man? No, it is

because of what is at stake - the preciousness of the gospel of God. Well, what is the battleground of this gospel? How are we to fight this enemy? Are we to take this fight to the churches and the theological halls? Are we to write letters in to the Belfast Telegraph, and try to get our faces on the television to defend this gospel? I'm not decrying all those things, and some of those things are necessary and God calls some men to do those things, but I'll tell you what Paul says here. He says that the battleground of this fight for the gospel is our conversation, our conversation.

Look at verse 27: 'Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ'. Now this word 'conversation' in the old English language of the Authorised Version that we're reading from today, it doesn't mean the language that you're speaking, but it means the life that you're living. It's not specifically talking about your talk, but about your walk. It comes from an old word that actually means 'citizenship', so you could translate this: 'Let your citizenship be as it becometh the gospel of Christ'. In other words, your conduct of life, the way that you live your life, the words that you say, the deeds that you do. So the battleground for this gospel is your citizenship as a Christian. Now this word 'citizenship' in the Greek originates from the word that we get 'politics' from, 'politics' or 'police', 'polisiti' (sp?).

What Paul is saying here is this: act in line with your new citizenship of the heavenly kingdom. These people are living in Philippi, but Paul is saying - if you look at chapter 3 and verse 20 - he says: 'Now that you're believers in Christ, your conversation is in heaven, your citizenship is in heaven. So, as you live as a citizen in Philippi, you're to live as you would as a citizen in heaven'. Paul is saying that being a citizen of heaven ought to make you a better citizen of Philippi. Now, where is the battle for the gospel won in this day and age, where the gospel is so confused? I'll tell you where it's won, not just in our characters, but in our conduct. The battle is being fought today more than ever upon the ground of how we as believers live as citizens, how we live as neighbours, parents, children, businessmen, businesswoman, employees, employers, students, tradesmen. The battle is won or lost as to how we live, whether we live as becoming the gospel of Christ, or whether it detracts from the gospel of Christ.

You might have heard the phrase: 'People often wear clothes that are becoming of them', maybe it's a hat or a coat, or a colour that becomes or is worthy of their face - maybe it's not worthy of their form, or presents them not in the best light entirely, it doesn't enhance their appearance. That is exactly what Paul is saying here: the way that we win the battle for the gospel today is if we live lives that enhance the gospel to those around us, and the way that we lose the battle is if we live lives that detract from the gospel and repel other people from the gospel. So the simple question to all of us today is: do you enhance the gospel, or do you detract from the gospel?

I hope you don't mind me saying, but: are you a good dummy for wearing the gospel? Do you set the gospel in a good light? Let me take you to Titus for a moment, and we're spending a bit of time over this because it's so important. Titus chapter 2, Titus 2, Paul again writing to Titus this time, says in verse 9: 'Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters'. Here's the question: as a Christian are you obedient to your boss? I'm not saying you let your boss walk all over you, but are you obedient to your boss as a Christian? Then he goes on: 'Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things' - do you please your boss well in all things? 'Not answering again', do you answer him back cheekily? This is wonderful, isn't it? Verse 10: 'Not purloining', or scheming, 'but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things'.

What's that talking about? It's that analogy of clothing, as Paul says: are you wearing a life, if you like, that is becoming of the gospel? He says it here: are you adorning yourself with the doctrine of God in all things? Can people see in everything that you do and say, in your conversation, in your citizenship, that you are a Christian and that you have nothing to be ashamed of? Or do you shame the gospel and repel others from it? Now this analogy goes through Paul's epistles, if you turn to Colossians for a moment, Colossians chapter 3 - now we're

getting to see this analogy of Paul, this illustration, he's talking about our Christian lives as like putting on clothes and taking off clothes that we shouldn't be wearing. In verse 8 of chapter 3 he says: 'But now ye also put off all these', put off all these old clothes and throw them into the corner - what are they? 'Anger', do you have a bad temper? You lose your temper in the home with your wife, with your children; you lose your temper in work, maybe you're a boss, maybe you lose temper with your boss. Paul says, and God says through Paul: 'Put it off!'

'Wrath', it's a different type of an anger, perhaps an even more boiling anger, over into uncontrollable anger - is that how you are with other believers who have done you wrong in your life? Paul says, and I want you to listen to this carefully: 'Put it off!'. 'Malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth', the stories that you tell, the double-meanings and the insinuations in your conversation, the newspapers that you read: 'Put it off!'. 'Lie not one to another'... 'Oh, I don't tell lies' - well, what is lying only bearing false witness, trying to be something that you're not, trying to wipe people's eyes maybe in your commercial deeds and affairs? Maybe it is even exaggeration, making things greater than they are or lesser than they are? 'Put it off!'. 'Seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds', he's assuming that we have already done this, 'put on the new man', here's your new wardrobe of clothes, 'which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him'.

Look down to verse 12, now here's the new clothes that you're to put on: '...as the elect of God, holy and beloved...Put on bowels of mercy', that means don't be hardhearted, don't be bitter, but be compassionate to your other believers around you. 'Kindness', thinking of others before you think of yourself. 'Humbleness', humility of mind, esteeming others greater than yourself. 'Meekness, longsuffering', patience with one another. 'Forbearing one another', putting up with one another, biting your tongue at times, 'and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any' - I want you to hear this very carefully now, listen: if any of you here today have a quarrel against anybody in this building, I would rather you wouldn't come back until you sort it out. Now I mean that: 'Put it off!', once and for all!. Here's the standard, why he can say this: 'even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness'.

Now all you have to do to sum this up is go, you don't have to turn to it if you don't want to, to Romans chapter 13 - and here's what he's talking about in all of it: 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof'. What is he talking about? He's talking about living the citizenship like Jesus Christ has lived it! Now that's something else. My question to you is this, you're all looking fine and dandy in your lovely suits and ties and hats and all the rest, but my question to you is this: do you spend as much time putting off and putting on these spiritual clothes as you do with your physical clothes? Do you spend as much money - spend as much money, that's right - on spiritual things as you do on earthly things? And here's the big question, if we were the blind fellowship here today, and no-one could see your lovely hat or your lovely tie or your lovely coat, would you take as much care about what you were putting on? You wouldn't, because no-one is seeing it. Here's what Paul says, listen to verse 27, he says: 'whether I come and see you, or whether I hear about how you're getting on, let it be that I hear about your affairs, that you're standing fast in one mind and in one spirit, striving together for the faith of the gospel'.

Do we only do things right and say things right when others are looking at us? Do we only come to the Bible Reading or the prayer meeting when the Pastor is in the pulpit? When do we do things right and when do we do things wrong? Do we do it for the right reasons or for the wrong reasons? Do we do it to be seen of men, or do we do it to be seen of God? I'll tell you this: when we do things to be seen of men, do you know what happens? Our affairs go abroad, and the testimony outside is that we're not doing this for Christ, and our citizenship is not for Christ, but it's for ourselves. The ultimate question that Paul is asking here of this church is: what is your testimony to the world outside? If I was walking down the street of Philippi, what would I hear about your little church in Philippi?

I think you would agree with me when I say that there's nothing more damaging to the gospel of Christ than the bad testimony of believing churches - nothing more damaging to Christians and indeed to those who are

unsaved. Do you know why? Because it makes the gospel a farce! People look at us and they say, and they rightly say, some of them: 'If that's what a Christian is, I don't want to be a Christian!'. I'll tell you, if that's what a Christian was, I wouldn't be a Christian. They see how we bicker inside the assembly at times, they see how we talk about others, and they rightly say: 'This testifies not to what they're saying, but what they're doing contradicts everything that they're saying'. As someone has said on one occasion: 'I can't hear what you're saying, for seeing what you're doing'.

Be very careful. A member of a church stopped his Pastor at the door one day and he said: 'Pastor, there's a couple living beside us and they believe a false gospel, and we were wondering did you have any literature that we could give to them that would help them'. The Pastor opened his Bible at 2 Corinthians 3 verse 2: 'Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men'. He said: 'Sir, the best literature that you can give your next-door neighbour is your own life. Let them read your own life, let them see Christ in your life, let them see the gospel at work in your life, and that will give you the best opportunity to share Christ with them'. No literature, no book, is a substitute any better than your own life!

What does it say in Acts chapter 4 and verse 13: 'Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus'.

'You are writing a gospel,
A chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do
And the words that you say.

Men read what you write,
Whether faithful or true:
Just what is the gospel
According to you?'

I'm finished my message this morning, but I want us to dwell for two minutes on this, because this is so important for the future of this assembly and for your individual testimony. What is it? The greatest vehicle for the gospel of Jesus Christ in the day and age that we live of false doctrine and false gospel is the vehicle of a godly life and a godly church. When people hear of David Legge, do they hear of a conversation that is worthy of the gospel of Christ? When people hear of the elders of the Iron Hall, do they hear of a way of life and a way of operation that is worthy of the gospel of Christ? When people see the deacons of the Iron Hall working, the members of the Iron Hall represented, the workers of the Iron Hall in the children's meeting and in the Sunday School and in the door-to-door work, in your workplace, on the factory floor - do they see a people that no matter what the cost is, as Paul says...I can almost hear Mrs James saying: 'Even if my husband is beheaded?', - yes! No matter what the cost is for you. Peter's wife saying: 'Even if my husband is crucified upside-down for the cause of Jesus Christ?' - yes! Even if that happens! John's wife: 'Even if my husband is boiled in boiling oil on the Isle of Patmos?' - yes, Mrs John! Even if that happens, that you walk worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Well? Is your life worthy? When people hear your name, what's the first thing that they think of? Is it godliness and holiness of life, or is it bitterness, is it complaining, is it backbiting? Is there any of us here today that need to put off old clothes and put on new ones? For I'll tell you, the greatest weapon to fight for the gospel, and the greatest weapon against the enemy the devil, is the consistency - that's the word! - the consistency of a holy, righteous, godly life, and a holy, righteous, godly church.

We have choices to make in these days: will we make the right ones? Let's bow our heads for a moment, because this is so important, so, so important. What is the prominent feature of your life as a believer? It's not

the fruit of the Spirit, is it? It's the fruit of the flesh. Where are you when we study the doctrine that's been delivered to the saints? Why aren't you at the Bible Reading? Why aren't you at the prayer meeting? Why don't you remember the Lord around the Table? This is what discipleship is, and if you're not doing it we can see there's something wrong in your life - but are you able to see it? Are you able to face it? Not what's wrong in somebody else's life, but what's wrong in your life. Will you face it today? I thank God for these people in the Iron Hall, and for the work that they do and the desire that they have to see souls saved, and we are praying, we're having days of prayer, we're bringing the lost under the sound of God's word - but I'll tell you this: you're living in cloud cuckoo land if you think you can sit in this Hall with bitterness in your heart and enjoy the blessing of God. Could it be that you could be the one that is hindering that blessing coming? Only you can answer that, and I implore you and I plead with you to put off these old fleshly clothes that don't belong on you, they're of your old nature, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Will you do it now before the Lord, and make the difference and turn around? Will you do it?

Father, we pray that all of us, as Thy people, would allow Thy Holy Spirit to do deep spiritual surgery to us today. Lord, who can say that we have no sin, for if we say that we deceive ourselves and truth is not in us. Lord, there are now at this moment people perhaps applying this word to the person at the end of the pew, to the person at the other side of the church that has offended them, but our Father, we've got to apply it to ourselves. We remember what the Lord Jesus said to His disciples: 'What is that to thee? Follow thou me'. Lord, what a church this would be if every man and woman put off the old clothes of bitterness, strife, compromise, and backsliding and sin; and put on the Lord Jesus Christ - there would be revival. Father, would You touch us; Spirit quicken us; Lord Jesus move us to leave all and put our hand on the plough, follow Thee and never look back. Lord, there are those here today who have looked back since the hour they first believed. Help them to see, our Father, that You take no pleasure in them that draw back. May they get a glimpse of the Lord Jesus, who made Himself of no reputation, who humbled Himself, and may they follow after Him in humility and meekness, and in godly fear. Lord, whatever is in us that would hinder Thy blessing in our lives and in our church, purge it we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 9

"The Marks Of A Spiritual Church - Part 2"

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Philippians 1:27-30

Philippians chapter 1 verse 27: "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me".

We've been studying in these last few verses of chapter 1, verse 27 to the end, marks of a good church - or, if you like, better put 'The Marks of a Spiritual Church'. We saw last week that the language that Paul uses tells us that there is a war on, and in this war the matter that is at stake is the very gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. For that reason, he says in verse 27, let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ. The gospel of Christ is what is at stake in our land among the witness of those who believe in the Lord Jesus, the Church of Jesus Christ. We were asking last week how we ought to fight the battle for the gospel, and that is the answer that Paul gives us right away in verse 27: 'Let your conversation', your way of life, or specifically the word generates from the word that is used of citizenship, 'Let your citizenship be that which becometh the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ'.

The gospel is fought, primarily, on the battleground of our livelihood, our citizenship down here on earth, and how we represent the Lord Jesus Christ in the way that we live our lives. We saw last week that there are certain types of clothing that belong to the old nature that we have left behind in our old way of life, and we are to put those clothes off and put on the new clothes that become the gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, our livelihood, our lives, our conversation, our citizenship ought to enhance the gospel, rather than detract from the gospel.

We saw how important that is, because the testimony of this little church was going abroad, and Paul was saying: 'I want to hear of your affairs, that whether I come to you or just hear about your testimony, that I hear that you're standing fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel'. Whether we like it or not, or whether we want to admit it, or whether we know about it, the testimony of the Iron Hall, the testimony that we hold as believers goes forth and goes abroad, and other believers hear about it. If we were to home in specifically to your individual testimony and personal conversation before the Lord Jesus we could say the same, that your affairs - whether people see it, as Paul wished he could see it, but he was in prison and he couldn't, but even in prison he was hearing about their affairs - how their lives were testifying, or not testifying, to the gospel and to that which becometh the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Really the crux, and the common denominator of our conclusion in the message last week was this: that there is no greater weapon fighting for the gospel, and fighting against the devil and his empire and his forces, than the consistency of a godly life and a godly church. Now we're going to move on today, because Paul says that if we are to be worthy, as a church he's talking to of course, but we can apply it individually to ourselves, that if we are to be worthy of the gospel of Christ we must be three things - or, if you like, we must do three things.

The first thing we find in verse 27 at the end: 'that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind'. So we're going to see today that the first thing Paul says is a mark of a good church, spiritual church, or a church, as he says

specifically, that is worthy of the gospel of Christ, is a church that stands fast, a church that stands together in one spirit and in one mind. If we go on we see that he makes it more specific by saying: 'striving together for the faith of the gospel'. So not only are we to stand together, Paul says, but we are to strive together for the gospel of Christ. As we read on in verse 29 we find that he says: 'For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake'. Now he's talking to the church, a body of believers, to stand together, to strive together, and they were called to suffer together for the name of the Lord Jesus.

There we have a threefold mark in Paul's mind of a spiritual church, of a good church, of a church that has a testimony, that is worthy of the gospel and calling of Jesus Christ. So let us look at the first today: to stand together, and he says - look at verse 27: 'stand fast together', or it could be translated 'stand firm together'. This Greek word that Paul uses is used of a soldier who was to defend his position and his post at all costs, and even if he was to come to the point of losing his own life, losing his family of course and the relationship he would have in this life, he was to stand fast at all costs. If it came to the point of giving his life for his cause, he was to do it. Paul is saying to the church: 'You have got to stand fast together for the conviction, the post that God has called you to despite all the opposition that comes your way'.

Now remember the great apostle is in prison as he's writing this, and he himself can say this because he is standing fast. We learnt in recent studies, a couple of weeks back, that Paul's testimony of how he stood fast in prison for the gospel was actually bolstering and encouraging and strengthening the other Philippians to go out and to preach the gospel because they saw in Paul's testimony something great of a man standing firm upon his convictions - and no matter if the whole Roman Empire was against Paul, he was going to stand fast, not be moved! Of course, it's twofold, standing fast - it's standing fast for God, and it's standing fast against the devil. Paul was doing both of these things.

I believe, perhaps, the picture that Paul has - and remember he's seeing soldiers everyday, in fact he can't get away from one because one is chained onto his arm - he's thinking about a military band or battalion, and they're all marching together. Sometimes you see this on our television, or if you've been to Buckingham Palace to the changing of the guard you see this: all of these soldiers, perhaps a hundred of them, stand and march as if they were all one man. They're consistent, they're shoulder to shoulder, there's not a man out of place, not a step out of time - they're all like one soldier. That is exactly what Paul is saying, look at it: 'stand fast, having the one spirit, and having the one mind'.

Now the 'spirit' here's not the Holy Spirit, he's talking about the spirit that you have - and you need to know that you're made up of three pieces, you're a tripartite being. You have a body that we can all see; you have a soul that is like your personality, it is the seat of your intellect, your emotions, and your volition, your will - you decide with your soul, you think with your soul, you feel with your soul. But this is not what Paul is talking about here, he's talking about your spirit: that part of you that is in contact with God, that was deadened before you were saved and now has been quickened, and you're made alive toward God in your spirit. Now he's talking about how we are to have a purpose and an aim in our spirit, and if our spirit is in connection with God our purposes and our aims will be whose? They will be God's.

'Be of one spirit', and that means have the aims and the purposes that God would have for you, be unified as the church of Jesus Christ in your purposes and in your programmes. If we can put it transversely, there are to be no divisions in the church of Jesus Christ. This is the mark, one of the marks, of a good spiritual church - having God's desires as our desires, having God's purposes as our purposes, having God's programme as the programme of the Iron Hall! That's what Paul is talking about here.

Then he goes on and he says: 'and being one in mind'. Standing fast together, one in mind - now the word for 'mind' here is the same word as 'soul', which is the Greek word 'pseukae' (sp?), and they are interchanged at times within the Bible. I've told you that one of the facets of your soul is your mind, your intellect: there are

emotions, there is your will, your determination, but there's also your intellect - you think in your soul, and that's why the word 'mind' can be translated in this way. But I believe that Paul specifically here means how you think in your mind, through your soul, with a determination and with a will to accomplish what is in your spirit given by God. OK, you get it like this: you're in contact with God, and God reveals to your spirit what His will is - well, you need to interact your soul and execute the will of your soul with determination to do what God has purposed and planned for you.

I hope we're getting the whole picture here today: a spiritual church is a church that allows God to speak spiritually to our hearts, and to display and disclose, and to diffuse His own will to our hearts. But it doesn't stop there, it's not all about knowing what God's will is, but the mark of a spiritual church will not only be of one spirit but of one mind - the seat of your will - an execution where you do what God has declared to you. Where the 'pseukae', the soul, is active; where you don't just have an aim, but you have aim and action; where you have a purpose. What we need today in our church, and among believers, and for the testimony of the gospel, is people who have a purpose, but act upon that purpose and go for it!

You've heard the old saying that if you aim at nothing you'll hit it - isn't that right? Sometimes, I must admit, it appals me the way we treat the Lord's work. We even make a plan to go out and do the shopping - not that I would know much about that, but I see sometimes a little list being made - and there's even a bit of thought being put into going and buying the groceries. There's thought about washing your car, there's thought about baking and doing the house cleaning and your finances, but at times when it comes to the work of the Lord there is this attitude: 'Ach, that'll do rightly'. My friend, if Paul is true, and we know he's true because he is inspired here by the Spirit of God, we cannot aim at nothing within the work of God. We cannot have no aims and no objectives, and we cannot be satisfied with knowing what we ought to do, but not having the will and the determination, the volition to actually execute - and, whatever it costs, to go for it!

I'll tell you this, in the light of Paul's letter to the Philippians, and in the day in which he is living, and in the day in which we are living - which isn't a million miles away to his own personal civilisation and experience - I believe that the only way that the gospel can succeed today is with a church that will stand fast together in one spirit and in one soul. That's what we need. Turn with me, we're never going to get through this again, we'll probably only get through the first one here, but Acts chapter 4 verse 32. I really feel that the Lord is speaking to us as a church through these verses, and that's why I'm spending a little more time than usual over them. Acts 4 verse 32, and of course you've got the acts of the early church here as well as the apostles, you see how the early church - probably in its most purest form - operated. Verse 32: 'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul'. You may ask the question: 'Why was the early church so successful in their execution of gospel ministry? Why was it that simple men and unlearned and ignorant men, were able to turn the world upside-down?'. I could point you to their prayer life, I could point you to their holiness, I could point you to how they gave everything that they had and put it altogether and clubbed together for the gospel - but certainly we couldn't ignore this: they believed with one heart and one soul '...neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common'.

They were working together for the cause of God in one spirit and in one mind. Of course in Ephesians 6 and verse 6 we read about the armour of God, that we as individual believers are to put on, and effectually when we all put on the armour of God we become a Christian army that we were singing about at the beginning of our meeting. We all walk together like armour-bearers, shoulder to shoulder, and we move like one whole soldier. Paul says we are to put on that armour and work for God, not with eye-service as men pleasers, but as the servants of Christ doing the will of God from the 'pseukae', the heart.

The reason why we have to stand fast together in one spirit and one mind is because we fight an enemy. Of course there is an enemy within in false doctrine and those who come among us unawares, but the primary enemy perhaps that we have is the devil himself. Our job is to fight with the forces of evil, and not be ignorant

of that evil. Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 4 please, Ephesians chapter 4, and we studied these in the Bible Reading a year or so ago. Verse 1, Paul is expressing the same sentiment about standing fast together: 'I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord', writing again from prison, 'beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called', that's the same thing as he said to the Philippians, that your conversation would be that which becometh the gospel of Christ. 'With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep', now that word 'keep' is the word for 'guard', 'at all costs guard' - it's a bit similar to 'stand fast', defending your post and not moving at all costs - keep what? 'Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' - why, Paul? Why keep this unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? Because that is when the testimony of the gospel will be the greatest, and that is when we will do the most damaging work to the enemy, when we are united together in the gospel!

I say it again because I want it to get through, that there is nothing that mars the testimony of the gospel as much as disunity in the church of Jesus Christ. The irony of these verses that we're reading together is that we ourselves, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, could be doing the devil's work in defeating the gospel through disunity in the assembly! Imagine that, for just a moment, those who have been liberated by the grace of God and by the power of the blood of Christ; delivered from the world, the flesh, and the devil by His cross - doing the devil's work! I tell you, if you're involved in this work of disunity and slander and backbiting and scheming and rebellion, you're the best disciple that the devil's got here in the Iron Hall! Do you hear that from the word of God today? If you don't take it from me interpreting the word of God, listen to the Lord Jesus in Matthew 12: 'A house divided against itself will fall' - sure, it's common sense, isn't it? But we as believers don't seem to be able to grasp this, or maybe we just don't want to grasp it! When we are divided, and people see that we are divided, the gospel testimony is done harm and we are not walking worthy of the gospel that we're meant to wear and enhance.

If you turn to John chapter 17 for a moment, and I want to show you very clearly that this is from the word of God. This is called the high priestly prayer, commonly, of the Lord; or could just be called His intercessory prayer. John 17 and verse 21, and here's one of the petitions that the Lord gives - He's been praying already and this is another petition, verse 21: 'That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us', now here's the reason that the Lord Himself gives that they should be one, 'that the world may believe that thou hast sent me'. Now let's go backward: 'Father', He says, 'if the world is going to believe that thou hast sent me, it's going to be necessary that my people are one as we are one'.

This is serious stuff, it's alright for the Pastor the preacher to be up here preaching about these type of things, but when you see the Lord Jesus Christ Himself on His knees before His Father praying that we would be one - does that not make you want to be one? When we realise that His gospel that He bled and died for is at stake, should that not make us want to be one? It was F.A. Noble that said: 'A church in which the sentiment of unity has been displaced by the bitterness of mutual will, might as well go at once into the hands of a receiver. The days of its usefulness and prosperity are at an end'. Do we stand fast together in one mind and in one spirit? I know that some of you can have a wounded spirit; I've no doubt that some of you in the seat of your emotions, the soul, has been hurt by another believer, or perhaps by something that has gone on in this assembly - I just do not know - perhaps in your mind, your intellect, the seat of your intellect in your soul, you have been hurt because you disagree with the odd thing here or there. I don't know what it is, maybe your will is hurt, but you just seem not to have it in you to obey God and to be at the Lord's Table, to be at the prayer meeting, to do what the Lord asks you to do, to do what the assembly expects you to do. Can I tell you: we have, as the Captain of our salvation, as the Commander of the Lord of hosts, the Overcomer and the Conqueror who defeated these things in His own life, and on your behalf has defeated these things - and He says through His Spirit using that same word 'pseukae' in Hebrews 12 and verse 3: 'For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your pseukae, in your mind'.

Now let's get personal this morning: what is it that hinders you standing fast with the rest of the believers in this assembly, with one spirit and one mind? Why is it that there are certain people who are busy bodies and bitter,

and won't talk to one another, and backbite? Why is it? It could be that they themselves have endured the contradiction of sinners, but the exhortation today is: don't give back what you get, but rather do not faint or be wearied in your soul, be steadfast, be unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Let me address some folk in this building who have been a long way on the road of faith with the Lord Jesus Christ. I tell you, it's wonderful when we're first saved, isn't it? It's wonderful to be excited with the things of the Lord and to stand fast for the defence of the gospel, but I'll tell you there's something greater than starting well. It's good to begin, but it's better to keep steadily on until the end!

I want to ask you today: where are you on your road of faith? We see the young enthusiastic soldier coming into the thick of the battle in the dawn of the day with his gleaming armour, and the light shining off it dazzling and blinding - what a great sight that is! But do you know what a greater sight is? When all the stench and the smoke of battle is fallen, and as Paul says in Ephesians 6 and verse 13, that 'having put on the armour of God, that we stand, and having done all to stand'. Are you standing today? Come on now, where are you in the work of the gospel? Where are you in the work of the assembly? Are you out of step? Are you not walking shoulder to shoulder? Are you standing at your post that you once stood at, but you've given in being fearful? My friend, this is a battle, and I'll tell you this: if we want to see people converted, if you want to see the glory that is in the gospel of Christ, and if we want to see an assembly and conversation, lives, among our assembly that becometh the gospel of Christ; we've got to stand firm fast together in one spirit and in one mind!

I'm led to believe that in World War II the RAF used to employ psychologists, psychiatrists. And one of the psychologists noticed that whenever the pilots, the Spitfire pilots, were out in the thick of the battle, whenever the bombers were doing their sorties, their nervous system was hyped up to such a peak, such a knife edge, and they were aware of every single thing that was going on around them - they were so conscious, so focused. Then they would come in towards - after surviving that fight, and that battle - they would come in towards the landing ground and the runway, and the psychologists and the psychiatrists noticed that there was an almost irresistible tendency to relax. Do you know when the most accidents happened? When they were coming in for their final landing.

Child, I say in grace to you today, and as I do to my own heart: have you relaxed in this spiritual battle? I address you as a people of God: have we relaxed? Have we relaxed in the work of God? This is a fight, and it's a fight to the death! The great prophet Daniel had many attributes that are worthy of our consideration today, but I'll tell you this, one that is perhaps his greatest that you would very easily scan by with your eye reading the story is in chapter 1 and verse 21, and it says this: 'He continued' - he continued. What the world needs today is not a flashing star or a blazing meteor, what the world needs to see today is churches and people who will stand fast with one spirit and with one soul. My question to you today is: will you be that people?

Let us bow our heads: now friends, I don't know about you, but I know God has been speaking to my heart through these messages - and that's why we're spending time on them. I hope sincerely He's been speaking to you, every one of you. Can you ask yourself the question: do you stand fast with this assembly? Or are there times that the assembly is mentioned on your lips in disdain, in criticism? Do you stand fast with the oversight and the deacons, do you help in the work? Have you a work for Jesus to do, or do you just do nothing? This is serious, this is the fundamental question that will lend to whether this testimony is here in ten years or not, and we need to face up to it now before it's too late. The rallying call of our Commander, Jesus Christ, today is: 'Come together, oh, you can have your differences of opinion, you can have different thoughts and feelings, but come together at least for the sake of My gospel, for the sake of My blood, for the sake of those who are lost, perishing and need to see consistency in the conversation of My people and My temple'. Will you give whatever's hurting you up to God? Will you let it go? Oh, I pray to God you will.

Father, we thank Thee for the two-edged nature of the sword of Thy word. Father, there is none of us here can say that we take it lightly, or that it's a great message to our hearts, because it's not - because we feel

condemned, we feel slain of the Lord. We feel compelled to put aside our petty differences, because of what is at stake: the great battle, the battle for the gospel, the battle for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, it was Thine eternal plan and purpose to have a holy and peculiar people, separated unto Thyself, unto the gospel for a testimony to Thy name. That was the prayer of our Lord Jesus, our Father, that they may be one as we are one - God forgive us, forgive us for our divisiveness, forgive us for our slander and our talking about one another in a censorious manner and not in a manner that is seeking after the betterment of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Father, the only One we should be talking to about our brethren is Thyself and is themselves, when we come beside them and ask is it well with them. Father, would you pour in the oil of healing into our hearts, even today would we hear of brethren and sisters going to one another, and putting away their differences as the Lord told us to: if ye have ought against your brother, or if any brother hath ought against you, go to them. Lord, we're in disobedience if we don't, so let us go today - that the blessing of the gospel of Christ should rest upon this testimony, for Jesus' sake we pray. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 10

"The Marks Of A Spiritual Church - Part 3"

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Philippians 1:27-30

Now turn with me again to Philippians chapter 1 - I do want, if possible, to finish these verses off today, but we're not going to rush through them because I feel there's so much important truth found in these verses for the local church and for those who would class themselves as members or attenders of any local church, not just this church but any local assembly in the New Testament sense. That's why we've been pondering for a while over these verses, to just decipher and taste the truths that are so important in this day and age, of what it means to have the marks of a spiritual or a good church - that really comes down to the people, because it's the people that make up the church. It's very difficult to read these verses without realising that Paul is inciting the church, if you like, into warfare because there is a war on, and there's something at stake in the war that we are fighting for - and of course we found out in the weeks that have gone by that that fight, that war, is for the faith of the gospel.

Paul has also told us how to fight that great battle of faith, it's to be fought on the battleground of our conversation - in other words, our way of life and our citizenship which is in heaven, but which is meant to be lived out on the earth. So we're meant to live as heavenly citizens, but upon the earth. If there's ever a heaven on earth, it ought to be the church of Jesus Christ in the way that they behave in their citizenship upon the earth - but he specifies that by saying that it is seen primarily in the way that our lives become the gospel of Christ, verse 27: 'Let your conversation', you citizenship, 'be as it becometh the gospel of Christ'. Our lives are to enhance the gospel, rather than detract from the gospel.

Paul knew that this was so important, because he knew that the testimony of the church - and indeed, the testimony of individual believers - was going abroad. For that reason he said: 'I want to hear that your conversation becometh the gospel of Christ: and whether I come and see you, or whether I hear of you, I want to hear this - for this is what is so important. You've got to realise that your testimony is going abroad...that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs'. And here were the three specific marks that we began to look at last Lord's Day and want to conclude, God willing, today - three marks of a spiritual or a good church. One: that ye stand fast in one spirit, and in one mind; here's the second mark: striving together for the faith of the gospel and in nothing terrified by your adversaries. Verse 29: 'For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake'.

Now I've broken them down into three marks of a spiritual church. One: to stand together, stand fast, or stand firm together in one spirit and with one soul - you remember that we defined that last week as one soul, one will, executing God's will that we find within our spirits. This week we're going to look at how the second mark is to strive together, not just to stand fast together as the church, but to strive together. We will see what we ought to strive together for, and then finally his, perhaps in the day and age in which he was living, the most characteristic mark of the church of Jesus Christ - which certainly in the West today is the least characteristic mark of the church, and it's this: to suffer together for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we're not going to take time to recap, we don't have time to do that, on what it was to stand together in the gospel - but we just saw that we need to be, as the church of Jesus Christ, of one spirit: and that has to be the deciphering of the spirit and will of God in our spirits as the church, that filters from God's Holy Spirit into the oversight, from the oversight into the deacons, from the deacons into the members, and right down that whole tier of responsibility within the church, so that the will of God is diffused right across the local church of God,

and God's will is done in one spirit. Then in one mind, or the word is one soul, and it is that executing seat of the will within our hearts that decides to do what God's will is, to execute God's will - not just to know it, but to do it. We see how important that is, and we were challenging all sorts of saints last Lord's day morning, no matter how long you are the road, to ask: how is it with you in standing firm and standing fast together in one spirit and one mind within the church of Jesus Christ?

Let's look at this second point of a spiritual church: striving together, verse 27 near the end: '...stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; And in nothing terrified by your adversaries'. Now just look down at the word 'strive' for one moment, because of course you know that the original scriptures were not written in English - some people think that God gave the Bible down in the Authorised Version from heaven, that is incorrect, of course it was in the original Greek. As much as we love our Authorised Version, the original Greek is the original scriptures in one sense, and we have to go back to them at times to find the real depth of the meaning to some of these words. When we look at this word 'strive' in the Greek language we find that it's the word 'sunathleo', and it means literally 'to contend', to contend or to fight - now not specifically in the battle sense that we were thinking of last week, when it says 'standing fast together' we thought of a Roman army, as it were, shoulder to shoulder working together as one whole body. As you look at that Roman army it would seem as if they were one person, working together with one spirit and one mind.

But Paul is now using a different illustration, he's going into the world of athletics, and the reason why I know that is that if you break this word down 'sunathleo', you see that the second part of the word 'athleo' is the word that we get athletics from - 'athleo', 'athletics'. The word 'sun' simply means 'with' - so he's saying 'with athletics'. You're to contend together, strive together, if you like, Paul is saying, with the energies as if you're taking part in some kind of athletic race or feat. This is so important, to see the great imagery that Paul is using. Now listen, what he's saying is: 'The marks of a spiritual or good church, they're to be like an army that stand together as one soldier, not many platoons or battalions that are split up with different battles and different inklings of fights, but they're to be like one army united together for the one cause'. Now he's using an illustration from the athletic world, and he's saying we're to be united together - and I think the point that Paul is really getting through with this is not so much the force, as we strive together, but the togetherness of it, that it's to be a striving together as a team, as a team.

Turn with me to chapter 4 of Philippians, because we have a little window on this whole matter in verse 3. Paul says: 'I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life'. Be encouraged, ladies, these were women who were labouring with the apostle Paul in the gospel, with Clement also - 'fellowlabourers', he calls them, he doesn't call them 'people who were under me', 'people who did what I said', 'my disciples', but they were fellow workers with the apostle Paul, because ultimately they were fellow labourers with God. But what I want you to see is what made this little church a great church, and what brought the apostle Paul great joy as he was locked up in prison for the gospel, something that marked them was not only that they stood fast together, but they strove together in the work of God.

So if standing fast is like a position, standing and not being moved, striving together is a little different - it's not giving in in any extent, it is moving forward; not just standing in a position, but it's action, it's overt, it's opposition, it's going into the attack - not standing together this time, but attacking together! They had some within the church who did this, and I really believe that the idea here, if we can ponder it for just a moment, is the picture of cooperation. 'Sunathleo', not so much an athletic event where there is a sprinter, or a man with a javelin - and they're all individuals trying to beat other individuals - but the picture that Paul is really trying to paint here is of a team together, like a football team or a rugby team, or some other kind of sporting team that depend upon one another and will never win the battle, or win the game if you like, unless they work together for the one specific goal.

What Paul is talking about is teamwork. Of course, on the greater scale there is Satan's team against God's team if I can use that phraseology - and I don't think it's irreverent because this is what Paul is pointing to. We are not individuals, John Dunn, the great poet, said: 'No man is an island' - and no matter how exclusive and isolated you want to be as a child of God, it is against the plan of God and the will of God, because we are all to be together in this battle, fighting and working together and striving together against the forces of darkness. We are to be pulling together, and the point is that as we pull together, strive together, and work together, we're all doing it - or meant to be doing it - for the one self-same goal. Everyone is looking for the goal.

Now if you go a verse before verse 3 of chapter 4 you will see the exact opposite that also existed within the church at Philippi. He says: 'I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord'. What a picture of a general church this really is, we could pick out any church within our whole land and you would find within it people who work together and strive with one another, and then there are others who strive against one another. You almost would think that we're in two different teams, fighting against one another, trying to win our own little battle against the Lord's people that don't think the same way as we do. Now I'm not saying that we've all to be like robots and have the same opinions, and you would have a hard job having some of the same opinions as me - I'm sure you would agree on that one! But friends, with regards to the gospel, we are meant to strive together - and there are not meant to be any divisions among us. Perhaps one of the greatest indictments that there is against the church of Jesus Christ today is the fact that a football team seems to be able to do this, but the church of Jesus Christ cannot!

No wonder the Lord said that the children of this world, at times, are wiser than the children of light. Let me just run this by you for one moment: just think if this assembly - just taking this assembly for instance, because I don't know any other as well as this one - if just for one month in the year we were to work together, just the level of unity that you find in a football team, that's all. Just the level of unity that you would find, working together and training, in a football team - you might say: 'Oh, you're really demeaning spiritual things today' - but I ask you the question: are we even doing that? If I'm demeaning spiritual things, are we doing this already?

The fact of what Paul is trying to get at is this: you need to start working more like a football team, or some kind of athletic team or organisation, to work together and strive together for the one goal if you're going to win this battle! Sometimes we get so caught up in our pompous piety that is only hypocritical, that we can't see past these things to see that at times the world could organise a teddy bear's picnic better than we can! Now friends, let's really be honest today: is there anything, and we've touched on this because it's very heavy on my heart in these days, is there any thing in our contemporary situation today that is more hindering to the gospel of Christ than division within His church? I don't think there is. I don't have to answer for any other church in this land, but I want to ask people here: do you know where you are? Is your little quarrel more important than the gospel of Jesus Christ? Is it? Because until it is, you've got no right to stand aloof and not strive with us in the gospel. Until it's more important, and means more, could it be that you seem not to be able to subordinate your little inkling problem and gripe and bitterness to the gospel? Well, I want to pronounce to you this morning, upon the word of God, that if that is your mentality and that is your spiritual position of stagnation, no church has any use for you - but worse than that, God has no use for you!

I wouldn't be too worried about churches having use for you, but the biggest thing that ever worries me as a preacher of God's word, and even just as a Christian, is that a day should come when God would not be able to use me. I fear, you know, that that's where some people are. I fear that for some it's not just outright rebellion or stubbornness, or an unwillingness to do things for the Lord, but it's found in this little phrase at the beginning of verse 28: 'In nothing terrified by your adversaries'. There are some people who are terrified of taking this final step of commitment, if you like, and striving together - oh, they'll stand fast for the things that they believe in, they'll fight a battle for principles, but when it comes to really going forward and moving together as a team they are afraid!

That's why Paul is calling for boldness and fearlessness and courage, and I'll tell you Paul was a man who could call for that, wasn't he? He's locked up in prison, shackled to a Roman guard, doesn't know how long he's going to be there - at the beginning he doesn't even know if he's ever going to get out of it. My friend, he had a right to tell people not to be afraid, but John could also say it, 1 John chapter 4 and verse 4 - the reason why we ought not to be afraid as we seek to go forward with the gospel is because He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world! We're not to be afraid of our adversaries in the world, because Christ is in us, the hope of glory.

Now there's a very important little Greek word in verse 28 that I want you to look at: 'in nothing terrified'. That word 'terrified' literally could be translated 'scared', 'in nothing scared'. Now we're back to the battle imagery here, and do you know what the imagery is? It is literally of a horse that is just about to charge into battle, but it shies back with sudden fear - perhaps it's the loud sounds of cannon fire in battle, or gunfire, I don't know what it is, maybe it's the smell of blood or the stench of the smog of the gunpowder or of the dampness of the battlefield - but for some reason that horse is shattered, and shuddering with fear and pain and nervousness, and just steps back from the fight. What a graphic picture! I'm not naive enough, I hope, or green behind the ears to think that everybody who doesn't stand fast with the church in the local assembly, and everybody who doesn't strive together for the gospel within the assembly, is rebellious or terribly sinful. I believe it is disobedience, but I believe at times, at the bottom of at all, there is a hurt, there's a wound, there's a fear. So many people, I know, in this assembly have been hurt from leaving other assemblies and circumstances of those, and I don't need to go into those, neither do I want to know anything about them in one sense - but sometimes that can damage you. It's just like some experiences that you have in your childhood that can damage you for the rest of your days in your life if you don't get them sorted out, well sometimes you can get hurt in an assembly, or in this assembly - and because of that you just close in on yourself, and you say: 'Well, I'm never going to make myself vulnerable again, I'm not going to open myself up and give my life for these people, for them to put the knife and when I open up my heart - never again!'.

Because of that you're like that horse that hears the great shouts and sounds, and scents and smells of battle, and shies away - you're frightened, frightened of commitment, frightened of hurt, frightened of accountability. My friend, I want you to hear very clearly the word of the Lord to you: 'in nothing scared by you adversaries'. It's alright applying these things to personal circumstances within the church, but it's very hard in the day and age in which we live in Northern Ireland to apply them to our own lives, isn't it? Because we don't really have to be scared, in an outside sense, for holding our faith. But I'll tell you, the way things are going in this day and age, things are going to get scary in the workplace, on the street corner, in the shopping centres, in the centre of our own towns when we seek to witness for Christ and preach the gospel - it's going to get more and more difficult in the age of pluralism and polytheism that we live. I'll tell you this: there have been times that I have been preaching on how important is to witness in your workplace, and dear brethren have testified to me that it's now not allowed for you to testify for the Lord in the workplace here in Ulster - that you can get reprimanded for doing it!

These are the days that we are living in, but my friend I feel in the depths of my heart that the call of the apostle Paul to us is: 'Don't be afraid of any of them!'. You say: 'That's alright, it's alright for you, what if you're going to lose your job? What if you're going to get in trouble? What if you're going to get hurt again the way I got hurt in the past in a local assembly or in a church?'. Listen my friend: I think that we are living in a day when it's calling for this kind of persecution and suffering for the Lord Jesus, for us to take it.

Turn with me to the Acts of the Apostles, we must spend time on this, it's so important - we mightn't get through it again today, but chapter 4 and verse 18. Now look what happened to the Apostles, and we can't divorce the Apostles, though how great men they were, from our own conduct in the day and age in which we live - and I'm going to pay a price for this one day from this pulpit, because there's going to be a day when you'll not be able to preach against certain sins. I think there's going to be a day when people in the pew, literally, and you might think I'm ridiculous, they could take a lawsuit on you for telling them that their way is

not the way to God! I do believe that that's going to come one day if there is not an awakening of the Lord and His Spirit before it. For you to tell people that they're wrong, that their culture is wrong, their religion is wrong, that it will never get them to heaven but lead them to hell, and Jesus is the only way - I believe you'll get into trouble.

But look what the behaviour of the Apostles was - verse 18. They were told not to preach or teach in the name of the Lord Jesus: 'And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard' - and I think there is the difference! They couldn't but speak, no-one could shut them up! We're shut up very easy today, aren't we? Chapter 5, look at them again, verse 40 - they are told again not to do it, and Gamaliel has given these high priests and religious leaders advice that if this is of God there is nothing they can do about it, and so they agreed to him - verse 40: 'And when they had called the apostles, and beaten them', they've just given them a hiding, for good charity or whatever, 'they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ'.

Now, I don't need to ask you the question: how different is this from the church today? They rejoiced! Do you know why? Because if you look back at Philippians, the verses that we are so ardently studying these Lord's Day mornings, Paul said that this very thing was proof of your salvation - the fact that you were striving for the gospel and willing to suffer for it - and it was also proof of the perdition of your enemies. You see, they had in their minds that there was something at stake as to whether they strove for the gospel or not, and whether they were willing to suffer for the gospel or not, and it was this: they felt it had a reflection on their own salvation! Now I'm not saying that they were trying to prove their salvation and win their salvation and earn their salvation, nothing like that, they were sure they were saved - but they felt that if they were truly saved they would strive for the gospel, and the men who were not saved would oppose the gospel, and their opposition of the gospel was a proof that they weren't saved, and their standing and striving was a proof that they were saved.

Well, if that was the ground and evidence of our condemnation or our acquittal in a court of law today, how many of us would be set free? Oh, my friends, 1 Peter 4 and verse 12, read these words very carefully: 'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified'.

Do we strive together for the gospel, and does that striving together cause us to suffer together? Listen, the Philippians knew the suffering that Paul the apostle had gone through, you only need to read Acts chapter 16 of when Paul was in Philippi, and when he suffered a riot and a beating because of his preaching, and then he was put into prison - you know the story of the Philippian jailer - well, that was all in Philippi! The suffering that the apostle was going through, and they had witnessed how he stood fast for the gospel, and strove for the gospel, and suffered for the gospel, and that's why he says to them in verse 30: 'Having the same conflict which ye saw in me' - 'This is what I suffered!'.

Do you know what that word in the Greek for 'conflict' is? 'Agon', it's the word that we get our English word 'agony' from. It's a word that can signify an assembly, a theatre if you like, where the Greek Olympic Games were played. Paul is saying: 'You have witnessed, like a theatre, my suffering, my agony, my conflicts, my turmoil'. It's like a contest of athletics between the powers of darkness, it's the sense of the word in 1 Timothy 6, fighting a good fight, running a great race, Hebrews 12. But specifically it speaks of an inward conflict of the soul that often results from an outward conflict of forces, and it implies a contest, this battle, this sport if you

like, between our spiritual foes and the forces of God and good. I'll tell you better than that: this word 'agon' is the word that is used in Luke chapter 22 of our Lord Jesus Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, and it says this of Him: 'Being in agony He prayed all the more earnestly: sweating as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground'.

Now listen: none of us can ever enter into the sufferings of Gethsemane, neither can we enter into the expiation of Calvary, but that is not the meaning here. What Paul is saying is that we are called to suffer on the behalf, on the behalf of Christ. Let's ask this question, we've got by whether we're standing together or whether we're striving together, here's the issue now: are we suffering together at the hands of men for the sake of our Lord Jesus? Remember what Paul was told at the very point of his conversion: 'For I will show him how great things he must agon' - suffer - 'for my sake'! What are we suffering for Him? I'll tell you this, this has really taken hold upon my heart because the church today seems to, at times, the opposite - I'm talking about the West now - of everything that we find entailed here in a suffering church. It's not a mark of us, we're comfortable, we're snug and smug in the pew, we're away from the harsh painful realities of the outside sinful world. But Paul says, as a church, and as a Christian, you'll really know how you're serving Christ and what your conversation for Christ is like, by how you're suffering for the Lord! And I tell you, the devil will make you suffer!

I'm not talking about a sore ingrown toenail, or the gastric flu, those aren't for Christ - I'm talking about suffering for righteousness' sake. What did Paul say to Timothy? 'Those, all of them, who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution' - all of them! I love John Wesley, John Wesley used to go on horse back around the little villages not only of England but of Ireland on occasion, and then into the Americas. But on one occasion he was riding along the road and he had been three days riding, and he realised that he also been three days without any persecution whatsoever. He was so horrified at this that he got off his horse, and he stood by the side of his horse and thought: 'What has happened to me? Three days without persecution! Have I backslidden? Have I some secret sin that I'm ignorant of?'. He fell to his knees and said: 'Lord, if there's anything that I've done against You that's the reason for the absence of my persecution, I confess them to you and I pray that You'll bring it back to me again'. There was a rough man at the other side of the hedge, and he'd heard him praying this, and he said: 'I'll fix that Methodist preacher', and he tossed half a brick over the hedge, and it hit John Wesley! He leapt to his feet with joy and he said: 'Thank You Lord, it's alright I still have Thy presence!'.

Three days without suffering for righteousness' sake - how long has it been for us? You know what's amazing about these disciples and early Apostles was: they counted it a privilege! We heard this morning around the Table of the Lord: 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ', how do we think of the grace of the Lord? Oh, we think of forgiveness, we think of eternal life, we think of communion with the Lord - do you know that wrapped up within the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is the privilege of suffering for His name?

The church at Smyrna was told by our Lord: 'Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: but be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life'. You may never have shed blood for your faith, but I'll tell you this: if you have never suffered in some way for your faith, in some way, it is a very empty confession. Caesar said: 'We'll root up this Christianity, off with their heads'. Different governors hastened one after the other, running after disciples to bring them to death, but the more they persecuted them the more they multiplied - why? Because they suffered together, they strove together, they stood together. The proconsuls ordered to destroy every single Christian, and the more they hunted them the more Christians there were, until at last - think of this - men actually pressed themselves against the judgement seat and asked permission to die for Christ! They were tormented, and they even invented torments, they dragged saints at the heels of horses, they laid them upon red hot gridirons, they pulled off their skin from their flesh piece by piece, they were sawn asunder, they were wrapped up in skins and dogged with pitch, and set in Nero's gardens at night to burn as torches. They were left to rot in dungeons, they were made a spectacle to all men in the amphitheatres, the bears

hugged them to death, the lions tore them to pieces, the wild bulls tossed them upon their horns - and yet Christianity spread, for the weakness of God is mightier than the power of men.

Can I just say to you as I close today, to a church and individual people - now don't miss this, listen carefully: God cannot get depth out of shallow lives. We must stand fast together in one spirit and one mind, striving together for the gospel of Christ, suffering together for doing both of those - and when we do that, we will have the marks of a good church.

Our Father, we think at this moment of those brothers and sisters in Vietnam, Korea, China, India, states in Africa and South America, Eastern Europe - where they are, as we speak and preach, suffering on the behalf of Christ. Lord, give them grace to be happy in it, and help us if the time comes - and Lord, if the time is now, in the sense that if we're not even suffering for Him now, how will we have the strength to do it then, when we may be asked in a day yet to be to lay our life down for the Master? Give us the grace to suffer for righteousness' sake, help us to strive together for the gospel, help us to stand together with one spirit and one mind in the truth. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 11

"The Majesty And Humility Of Christ - Part 1"

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by Pastor David Legge
Philippians 2:1-11

We're turning in our Bibles to Philippians chapter 2, Philippians chapter 2. Of course, we've had a break from our studies in Philippians due to the Christmas and New Year recess, and of course we were taking up subjects and themes that were applicable to that particular time in the year, but we're beginning again our studies this morning in Philippians chapter 2. We'll read the whole chapter, well not the whole chapter, but the whole of this great hymn, as it were, from verses 1 to 8: "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross".

Let's read on: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father".

Let me just say at the outset of this message that this passage is holy ground on which we stand, and it is unapproachable in its majesty and the magnitude of the spiritual depths that we have contained within it. There is no rhetoric that any preacher or writer could conjure up that could in any way add or even explain the splendour of the spiritual truths that we have encapsulated within these first 8 verses that we're going to look at this morning, because there is nowhere in the whole of the Scriptures that the extremes of the Saviour's majesty and His humiliation are put together and contrasted and connected in the person of the Lord Jesus and the stoop that He took from heaven to earth. In these 10 or 12 verses or so we have Paul the apostle, inspired by the Holy Spirit, at the one point having the Lord Jesus on the supernal universal throne of deity as God before the worlds began, and yet at the other point we find Him at the point of total and utter humiliation, nailed to Calvary's cross and bearing the sins of the world. Of course these great steps that our Lord Jesus took were steps that approached always nearer and nearer man's sin and man's awful need.

The strange thing, you would perhaps think as we read this passage of Scripture, is that this great truth of the condescension of our Lord Jesus Christ, coming from heaven to earth, is used not just as an outline of some kind of theological truth and dogma, but it is used as an illustration to the church at Philippi of what they should be like in their relationships toward their brethren and sisters in Christ within the church. Of course, you know that as we've been studying this little epistle, that the greatest overarching theme of all is the theme of joy, the joy that ought to be in the believer's life. We find that one of the chief ways that we can have joy as individuals and as an assembly is through the unity and the bond of peace that we have in the fellowship of our Lord Jesus Christ, but primarily in the fellowship of the local church. There's a great joy in loving one another, and being united together with one another, and indeed putting one another before ourselves.

This great truth of the condescension of our Lord is used as an illustration of how we ought to behave towards one another, that's what the first four verses tell us. Look at verse 1: 'If there be therefore any consolation in

Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others'. If we could sum up those first four verses, and indeed the whole passage, it would be summed up in the last word of verse 4: 'others' - others must come before ourselves.

Now, if you know anything about the little town of Philippi, and indeed about the Greek world in which they lived, you will know that the Greeks were a proud people. Indeed, they had every excuse, if you like, to be proud because they excelled every other civilisation in their age. You look at their philosophers: you've got Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. They have the great comedians, the great tragedians, the poets, the sculptors - Greek architecture was second to none. They excelled in science and astronomy, in mathematics, in medicine. Indeed I'm led to believe that Hippocrates is still the man who is thanked and lauded as paving the way to our modern-day medicine that we have with us today. In government, in law they paved the way to what we know today as democratic rule, democracy, the ruling of the people. A great people who had every reason to be proud in themselves.

Of course we have learnt in recent weeks that this great people in Philippi were taken over by the Romans and the Roman Empire, and they became a little Roman colony. As Paul is writing to them they have known approximately 200 years of Roman rule. The Romans were also very proud people, they were not innovators, but one thing the Romans were was imitators. They loved to imitate other great societies, one of which was the Greek society, and they would build great temples like the Greek temples - only they wouldn't build them out of marble, they would build them out of brick and mortar and then they would put a veneer of marble upon them. Not innovators, but imitators - yet they were still a proud people. Even their great emperors, and the Emperor particularly that was ruling over the Greek region at this time in Philippi, took unto themselves the status of divinity. They said and decreed that they were god, and they therefore would be worshipped as god. Because of that many Christians in this age were put to death, for not bowing the knee to Caesar.

Do you see what Paul is saying here? 'Philippian believers, your conduct as Christians is not to be dictated by the spirit of the age, by what you have known in your life or what your civilisation has known in its culture, but your personal conduct' - verses 1 to 4 - 'has to be modelled on the person of Christ'. You would know that every great creation has an archetype and a pattern, it has an original - a prototype if you like, and once you get that prototype, that model, you can make millions and reproduce thousands upon thousands of copies from that one original. It is the first original machine and model that really counts. If you're familiar at all with the whole of Old Testament history, you will know that right up to this point in the New Testament, that for 4000 years God, the God of heaven, has been trying to show to men their utter inadequacy - all humanity, no matter what kind of character they might be - that they are depraved and that they cannot reach God or please God. You have an Adam, and then you have an Abraham, then a Moses, then a David, and even an Elijah - all of them without exception have failed in the eyes of God, and we have the records of their failure within the Scriptures. The Lord was trying to show man that they were failures, but the epitome of this great lesson was: when God in the fullness of time sent forth His Son, born of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law, to show - here is the man that humanity and civilisation has been waiting for! Here is the man who is given by God to be humanity's pattern! The man Christ Jesus, the type of true human character by which all others must and ought to be moulded and fashioned.

We can see this on the banks of the Jordan, when at the baptism of our Lord Jesus the heavens opened and the voice of God is heard to say: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'. God's eye had scoured the whole of history from creation right to the very end of time, and there wasn't one other, and neither will there be another that He could say that of - 'In whom is all My delight'. Because of that Paul is telling these Philippians that this is the one to whom all the lives and conversations of believers ought to be conformed to. This is the

Christian's pattern, this is the divine pattern, for this Christ Jesus is the image of the eternal God. He is the firstborn of all creation, the firstborn of many brethren - if you like, He is the model that we are to model ourselves on, He is the pattern for our lives.

Paul was a good example, many of the apostles were good examples, but all of them were only lights that reflected and received illumination from the Son of God, and shed that light abroad to the benefit of others. Let us never forget that although we esteem an apostle, we only esteem them so far as they follow and exemplify the pattern of Jesus Christ - it is Christ to we follow! We are Christ's ones. Let us not forget that, as we have this great truth of the condescension of our Lord, it is all caught within this exhortation for us to be like Him in His humiliation and His suffering, and as an illustration of what we ought to be in our Christian conduct.

The great Dr. A.B. Simpson gave seven points, there are seven steps here of the condescension of our Lord, but he mirrored those seven steps in the seven points of our humiliation that ought to come from God's divine pattern, and I want to give you those headings today. The first is this: conscious dignity. Second: voluntary surrender. Third: complete surrender. Fourth: surrender of the will. Fifth: His earthly position. Sixth: obedient to death. Seventh: His final sacrifice. Under those headings let us look this morning at the great stoop that our Saviour took. The first thing that we find in verse 5 is this: 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God'. While this is a picture of the humiliation of our Lord Jesus, you have to see that it begins at the great height that our Lord Jesus stooped from, the height of His glory, and His splendour, and His majesty. We see from this that He was conscious of His dignity before He took that great stoop.

He was in the form of God, the Authorised Version says, another version says 'in very nature He was God'. The sense of this description is that He gave in eternity past, if I can say that, an outward manifestation of an inner reality of the fact that He was God - but He manifests that in the great glory and majesty, the effulgence of His being. His essential form was never altered, and even when He came in human flesh it was not altered, neither will it ever be altered. He is, was, and ever shall be existent God, pre-existent, present, and ever-existent - God, world without end. That of course agrees with the rest of Scripture, and I hope you concur with that. The Bible testifies that He is the image of the invisible God. Hebrews says that He is the effulgence of God's glory, He is the very image of His substance. John 1 verse 1: 'In the beginning was the Word', Christ, 'the Word was with God, and the Word was God' - and there was not anything made that was made without the Word, for He is God!

But what I want you to see in the light of your pilgrimage down here on earth: it was because of Christ's consciousness of His own dignity that He was enabled to take the stoop that He took. What do I mean? I mean that those of lofty, holy character are able to condescend. While others are filled with a raging passion for their own vainglory in trying to keep and grasp hold of their own dignity, who seek earthly honour, who are always trying to hold on to the little reputation that they have - one of true rank, one who is conscious of dignity is indifferent to outward appearances, because He knew that His dignity could not be questioned. Do you see it? It didn't matter what people thought of Him, it didn't even matter what people saw of Him - there was nothing in Him that we should desire Him - He knew who He was! He knew where He had come from!

What a lesson there is for us in our Christian conduct to realise that before we can imitate God's Son in His humility, we need to realise the high and the holy dignified calling that we have as sons of God, born again unto good works. When we realise who we are in Christ and what we have in Christ, it will not be hard to stoop to even the lowest depths of self-abasement and self-sacrifice. He was conscious of His own dignity.

The second thing is this: it was a voluntary surrender. It says in verse 6, the second half: 'He thought it not robbery to be equal with God'. It could be translated like this: 'He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, or something to be jealously retained'. The word 'grasped' could have two meanings - it either

means something that is seized, something that is grabbed hold forcibly upon, even something that is stolen, that can be another meaning; or it could mean a prize or an award that one is striving toward. Something that you're taking or something that you're moving toward. Whatever the meaning is it can be applied to our Lord Jesus, because the remarkable thing about His condescension to earth was that He did not cling on to His rights and to His privileges as God. He didn't hold on to them, He didn't jealously grasp them or retain them. Or the other meaning: He didn't strive toward them as a possession to use, or to be seen to use.

The first reason He didn't do that was because He was sure of it. He didn't need to prove to Himself who He was, He didn't need to prove to others who He was, He knew who He was! His claim to be God, as He did on many occasions, didn't detract from the glory of God, but the main point that Paul is making here is: He did not hold on to His rights and honours, but He willingly, voluntarily, gave them up and yielded them! Her majesty Queen Elizabeth, our Queen, is in the form of a Queen when she is seated on her throne and she is robed in the ermine and the scarlet and the gold, she has her crown on her head and her sceptre in her hand, with her officers and her subjects before her. She is in the form, the manifestation, she is in essence the Queen, but she manifests herself as such in the glory that she effulges. We go to the book of Job and we find that there is God over all the universe, and it says that the sons of God and even the devil come and parade themselves answerable to God, and that is the picture of the majesty and the glory of God - the whole world is answerable to the sovereign God!

He is the Creator, and His creation come and bring obescience to Him. Isaiah 6, he says: 'In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple' - and the seraphim and the cherubim came and worshipped Him. That is the position of the rights of God, the prerogative of God, to be sitting on His throne and to have His creatures not only come before Him answerable, but come before and serve Him and worship Him. Of course you know, I hope, that in John 12 John says that when Isaiah spoke of the one high and lifted up he was speaking of the Lord Jesus in all of His glory, in all of the effulgence of His majesty and greatness, in all of His rights as deity, and His prerogatives as God from all eternity. Of course we know in Revelation 4 and 5 that there's a day coming when all of redeemed humanity will be round His throne again, and they will sing: 'Glory and honour and blessing and power be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb' - who will be on the throne once again for ever, and ever, and ever!

My friend, for a space of 33 years on earth He voluntarily laid aside that glory, that majesty. He didn't lay aside His deity, it could not be laid aside, but He voluntarily laid aside the manifestation of who He was. Our Majesty could step down from that throne and take off her crown, and take off her garments, put down her sceptre, walk out of the palace, go into a workhouse, take upon herself the garb of a servant, do a servant's work - but she still has the rights of her royalty and sovereignty. That was not Christ: He who had the rights voluntarily laid the rights aside. I think that is awesome. What a lesson it is for us, when we see ourselves made in the image of the first Adam; Adam who in the garden aspired to be as God, and fell - yet here we have a picture of one who didn't grasp at His godly rights that were His, and exalted Himself, and exalted and redeemed Adam's fallen race! Isn't that wonderful? He stooped down so low to lift up us sinful humanity.

He was conscious of His dignity, it was a voluntary surrender, it was also a complete surrender - for Christ did not give up something, the Bible says He gave up all. Verse 7: 'But made himself of no reputation', it could be translated 'He emptied Himself'. Theologians call this the 'kenosis' (sp?) theory - in other words, the word 'kenosis' is derived of the Greek word 'to empty' or 'to divest', which is the word here 'made of no reputation'. He emptied Himself, the word is 'emptied'! It does not mean that He emptied Himself of His character or His nature, just like you can't empty yourself of who you are. What it does mean, and I'm going to give you five ways very quickly that He did empty Himself. First, He emptied Himself of the divine glory, it was hidden in Him. Don't say it wasn't there, it was there, but it was hidden in His flesh. He forsook the worship of heaven, He submitted Himself - think of it - the misunderstanding, the denials, the unbelief, the false accusations and every form of persecution by the hands of sinful men - in that sense He emptied Himself.

He emptied Himself of the independent divine authority. In John 10 He said: 'I and the Father are one'. He made no secret about His equality with God as a person in the Godhead, yet equally throughout the whole of the Gospels - Matthew to John, and especially John - He declares His utter and absolute dependence upon God. He voluntarily gave up His independent divine authority, so that He could rely on God by faith. What an emptying! Thirdly, He emptied Himself of the voluntary exercise of some of His divine attributes. He did not cease to be God, He could not cease to be God - don't believe that lie of the devil! He did not stop being omniscient, or omnipresent, or omnipotent, or immutable - but rather, this is the key to it all, He chose not to exercise the full limit of those attributes during His earthly life, He chose not to use them! He hadn't got them taken off Him, but He exercised them selectively and partially - so much so that He could look at Nathaniel and say: 'When you were under the sycamore tree I saw you', but yet in Matthew 24 He can say that no man knows the day or the hour of the second coming of the Lord, not even the Son of Man - now you work that one out! - only for the fact that He withheld the knowledge from Himself.

Oh, He emptied Himself of His eternal riches. You know that verse that we often hear quoted, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9: 'He became poor that we, through His poverty, might be made rich'? That's got nothing to do with the fact that He lived in the wildernesses of Judea, that He had no pillow to put His head on, it is speaking of the magnitude of the riches that He had in heaven, and the fact that He had the adoration of heaven, and He gave all that up - that's what it's speaking about! The great thing that He gave up and the poverty that He came to - why? Because the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

Also He emptied Himself temporarily of His unique, intimate, face-to-face relationship with the Father. For all eternity they had related to one another in the Godhead, the triune unity, one in substance, three persons, having that perfect love with one other - yet when He came to the earth there was not that face-to-face bond that there always had been in fellowship and communion, He prayed like a man prayed. But all of it is epitomised and climaxed when we get to Calvary, and there He is crying: 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?'. What an emptying! It was that horrible prospect, I believe, that caused Him to sweat great drops of blood in the garden, deeply grieved to the point of death.

Can you see how He voluntarily gave up the manifestation of His glory - just as Moses veiled his face when he came down from the mount, Christ veiled His glory in His flesh! Imagine this: the Word made flesh, dwelt among us. You know the tabernacle, that in the tabernacle was the Ark of God, and upon the Ark of God there was the presence of God resting on the mercy seat, and there was the Shekinah glory in that tent - right in the holiest place of all. Christ had that glory in Him, but He veiled it in human flesh so that when we would see Him there was nothing that we should desire Him - and in fact, I say it very reverently, if He was in this room physically you wouldn't be able to spot Him! Yet it says in heaven there will be no sun there, why? Because the effulgence of the light of His glory is so great that it will be the sun. That is what He laid aside, yet when we go with Peter, James and John to the Mount of Transfiguration, what happened? In the same way that He voluntarily laid aside the manifestation of that glory, He then laid aside that voluntarily laying aside, and allowed the glory to effulge and burst out of His being so that they saw Him in all His glory - and what did God say again? 'This is My beloved Son in whom is all My delight'.

Everything that Jesus did, this is remarkable to me, was not so much done in the forth-putting of His own uncreated, divine power - but He chose rather to be utterly dependent on His Father. If that is not emptying, what is? John says that He did nothing of Himself, but what He saw the Father doing; He spoke no words of His own, but those that He heard the Father speaking; He committed no works of His own, but those which were of the Father who had sent Him. He chose that His human life should be one of faith, and here's the big question: why? Why? For love of you. Does that not astound you? For love of you. He didn't come as a King, in the vestitures of a King, in the palace of a King - why? Because He wanted to live a truly human life, He wanted to walk our walk, He wanted to weep our tears, He wanted to receive the plenitude of God's power via the vessel

of prayer and faith, because He one day would be our Great High Priest and we would have to come to Him in all of our trials, in all of our problems.

As one writer said: 'He forwent the use of His attributes that lay all around Him like tools within the reach of the skilled mechanic'. Don't you think they weren't there, don't you think that He couldn't have used them. He said Himself: 'Thinkest thou not that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels' - but here's the crux of this passage: He didn't ask for them! Not once! Why? So that you could come to Him in your weakness, in humility, and derive strength from one who was tempted in all points like you are, sin apart.

What's the second reason? We haven't got through the seven points, but I'll leave you with this: the second reason is that you should realise that you are a son or daughter of God, and voluntarily and completely you should surrender yourself to the will of God. Next week we will see that the God of heaven became flesh and surrendered Himself to the will of others. Let's read verses 4 and 5 as we close, verse 3: 'Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus' - what an illustration!

Let us all bow our heads. Maybe there is someone here this morning that is not converted, and you have never realised what the Lord Jesus did for you that you might be saved. I pray that the Holy Spirit will open your heart to realise what He gave up, what He came to and put on, that you might be saved. All that is required is that you reach out by faith and accept Him as your Saviour, and accept the gift of forgiveness that He procured at Calvary for you, and go home today knowing Christ as your Saviour. Believers among us: does it not thrill your heart to be reminded what He did for us, but does it not exhort us to behave in this fashion towards our brethren, towards all around us? It will be those who realise their dignity as sons and daughters of God who will be able to make that stoop. I pray to God that we will all have this mind.

Our Father, we are astounded, and no words of man - and we say it reverently - no words of Scripture could ever grasp the magnitude, the spiritual gasp of horror, at the God of heaven stripping Himself of the rights and the manifestations of His glory, and coming to earth in poverty to be the Saviour of humanity. Lord, we thank Thee, and we pray that that mind of humility and of surrender will be found in us as we relate toward our God and one another, for Christ's sake we pray. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 12

"The Majesty And Humility Of Christ - Part 2"

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Philippians 2:1-11

I want us to turn together in the word of God to Philippians chapter 2 to our scripture reading, Philippians chapter 2, and we begin to read at verse 1. We began, last week, a glimpse at the Christian pattern, looking at the person of our Lord Jesus and specifically the stoop that He took as He left heaven to come down to earth to be our Saviour. We only got a few - the first three - steps looked at last Lord's Day morning, and God willing we want to look at the last four today, and slightly at His exaltation.

But we'll begin reading at verse 1: "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father". Amen.

We were looking last week, as I said, at the Christian pattern - the stoop that our Lord Jesus took. This is a great portion of scripture, some scholars believe it was an ancient Christian creed, a basis of belief; others believe it was a hymn, a doxology of praise, Christologically speaking - outlining the condescension of our Lord Jesus from heaven to earth. Of course, I don't think there's any other portion of Scripture that can match in majesty and beauty the wonder of what it was for our Lord Jesus to leave heaven and come down to this sinful earth. But you will remember that the most important thing, perhaps, that we noted last week contextually from this passage is that it is found in the context of Paul's exhortation to these Christians in Philippi to behave like this towards one another. That the whole point of this passage, it's not just to give us a Christological doctrine of theology of what it meant for the Lord Jesus to be in the form of God, and step down, and left His glory aside and came into humanity, and humility, and all that the cross meant for Him, and then was subsequently exalted by God because of His stoop - it's more than that. It's giving us an example, and Paul is using this great theological truth to show us that as Christ stooped, so we must stoop - one toward another, of course.

That call is found in the first four verses of our passage, and it is a call to unity. 'If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy' - my joy is when you are humble toward one another, when you're 'likeminded having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind, and letting nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves'. It is a call to unity - now note: it's not a call to uniformity, that we all have to be clones of one another, that we all have to in every single iota believe the same as one another. Of course it's speaking fundamentally of the things that we believe, the faith delivered once to the saints - we've all got to stand one together, with one mind. You remember the previous verses of chapter 1 that told us how we had to stand together firm in the faith, and fight for the faith, and strive together in the faith.

It is to be of one mind, to be in unity, not uniformity, to be in unity. But of course Paul tells us that the way of unity is to have the mind of Christ. Verse 5: 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus' - and in

verses 5 to 11 that we'll study today, Paul describes how this mind of humility, and esteeming another better than yourself, is found actually expressed in God Himself, and how God Himself in the person of Christ had stooped down in humility toward humanity. In later studies we'll look at verses 12 to 16, but in preface I'll tell you that that simply is another expression of this humility, another expression of the mind of Christ in the assembly at Philippi. In verses 17 to 18 we find the expression of the mind of Christ in humility in the great apostle Paul himself. In verses 19 to 24 we find the mind of Christ expressed in Timothy, Paul's servant. In verses 25 to 30 we will find the mind of Christ expressed in Epaphroditus.

What Paul is saying is this, it's a great epistle of joy as we know, and he's already expressed that the joy of Christ will be experienced in the assembly of God when we love one another, when we have peace with one another, and when we put one another before ourselves, when we in lowliness of mind - which is the mind of Christ - esteem one another better than ourselves; then we will know the joy of Christ in our experience. The tragedy is that the tendency of ourselves, and even the believers in Philippi at this time, is to magnify our differences and minimise our agreements, the things that we have in one mind. This verse 5 could be translated: 'Let the attitude be in you which was also in Christ Jesus'. It seems today, as it was in Paul's day, that we as believers often strike our attitudes on the ground of our disagreements, rather than striking our attitudes on the ground of our agreements. Now I'm talking about fundamental things here, I'm not talking about agreeing with those who deny the fundamentals of the faith. We would have to agree in this room this morning that many of us will disagree on little matters, and it is our prerogative to do that, and we believe in the freedom of conscience. But we must believe, perhaps, 95% of biblical things in one mind and with the one spirit, we must be in agreement at least on 95% of things. But the tendency, and I believe it's the tendency of our old Adamic human nature, is to focus on the disagreements, to strike our attitude to one another on the grounds of the things that we disagree on, and maximise our disagreements until eventually they eclipse what we do agree on, and they become the focus of everything that we are and do.

The fact of the matter is that this was what Paul was speaking against. He says this, and I think you will see that it's very clear right throughout the whole theme of this epistle, that true biblical spirituality that will engender joy in your life is a man and a woman who is able to work with those whom he disagrees with. He's able to esteem another better than himself, and put away a petty difference, and work with that man in the unity of Christ and for the furtherance of the Gospel. The fact of the matter was that this church in Philippi was in Philippi, and there were no motorcars or buses or trains for them to go to another church, when they had a disagreement with one another they had to put up with one another because they lived in Philippi and they had to worship there. But Paul's fear was that because of the strife that potentially was going to erupt from within them, that what happened to the Jews would happen to the Christian church, in that they would be smashed into many fragments, perhaps right across the whole world. He didn't want that to happen - and I wonder today has that fear of Paul been realised in the many denominations and factions and sects that we have in Christendom?

Paul is saying that you've got to put aside these differences - not doctrine now, not teaching and the things that become sound doctrine, but petty personal differences - that is the right thing to do, Paul says. Any of us who have tried to do it will know that the right thing is always the hardest thing. I think that's probably catholic with regards to everything in Scripture, it's universal that the right thing to do is always the hardest thing to do. Have you ever tried to do what's found in verse 3: 'Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves'? Do you always esteem other people better than yourself? That's mighty, isn't it? Do I esteem other preachers better than myself? You might think that's not too hard for me, but perhaps put it on you: something that you think you're good at, do you esteem the other person to be better than you at that particular thing?

Now we have a human nature, and often we say: 'Well, my human nature isn't like that' - but we must remember that God has given us a new nature. I know that it's inevitable that within our human nature this old Adamic sense and temptation and passion will rise up in us to think of ourselves better than another, and to look down

our noses at others; but we must remember that God has made us new creatures in Christ Jesus, and all the old has to be passed away and everything become new. Really what Paul is saying is that we are no longer to be selfish. The Christian New Testament believer is no longer to be selfish! So, in verse 1 to 4 he's inspiring us to think of others - the last word of verse 4. He's thinking of our personal conduct, what we learnt last week: that our personal conduct is to be modelled upon the person of Christ and His condescension, He is the Christian pattern in the stoop that He took when He came from heaven to earth.

Now we saw last week, let's quickly recap over it: first of all of He was being found in the form, the nature of God - He had conscious dignity. We found last week that this was speaking to us of the fact that because He was lofty in His character, He was able to condescend. Because He knew who He was, and He knew that no-one could take away from Him what He was in nature, He was not afraid of humbling Himself. One has said: 'Self-assertion is alien and superfluous to a person in himself who has an undisputed right to deity'. He didn't need to self-assert Himself, He didn't need to push Himself forward as if He was God, because He was God and He knew He was God - and the very first stepping-stone to His condescension and humiliation was His own recognition of His dignity as God.

What a lesson we learnt from that, because we realised that we will not be afraid of what other people think of us or say of us if we know who we are and what we really are - if we have a conscious dignity. Of course, all of us are the same in the sense that we are all the sons of God, and we've got all the promises of God. Then the second stoop we saw was voluntary surrender - look at verse 6: 'He thought it not robbery to be equal with God', or as it has been translated: 'He thought it not something to be grasped at'. We saw that that word 'grasped' means something seized or carried off by force, or it can mean a prize or an award. In other words, He didn't need to steal a reputation as God, because He had it - He had the conscious dignity in Himself. But neither did He strive toward it as a prize, because He didn't need to win it as a prize because He was God. But I think in the context of what Paul is saying here, trying to encourage believers to be humble toward one another, the main point that he's making is this: that He willingly yielded up His rights as God in a voluntary surrender - He didn't grasp at what was rightfully His, He didn't strive towards it as a goal, He didn't steal at it, but He gave it up. Just as the first Adam in the garden of Eden aspired to be like God, the Lord Jesus, the last Adam, did not grasp at it. Adam fell, but Christ is exalted - for the pattern of God is that when you abase yourself you will be exalted.

Voluntary surrender...the third thing was complete surrender, we saw that it wasn't just surrendering something, but it was surrendering everything. Verse 7: 'He made himself of no reputation', and we saw that that word literally means 'nothing', or 'emptied Himself'. Now let me say this: the false 'kenosis' (sp?) theory that says that Christ emptied Himself of His deity is a lie! Let me make that clear! The word 'kenosis' is in this passage, but I want you not to misunderstand me: He did not empty Himself of His deity, for if He emptied Himself of His deity, He emptied Himself of the form, His nature. If you empty yourself of your nature you cease to be what you are - just as you, if you emptied yourself of your nature, you would cease to be who you are. It was impossible for Him to do it, nevertheless the word means and insinuates: 'Emptied Himself of all' - a complete emptying.

Now, what was it a complete emptying of? Let me recap with you: His divine glory was hidden in human flesh; He emptied himself of His independent, divine authority to use His attributes without God the Father, He never ever did that; He emptied Himself of the voluntary exercise of some of His divine attributes; He emptied himself of His eternal riches - He was rich, for our sakes became poor - and the poverty was not the poverty of the earth, so much as the poverty of being stripped of the riches of heaven. That's the point! He emptied himself of the unique, intimate, face-to-face relationship with His Father. Temporarily on this earth He was not in the communion that He always knew, but He was separated in a body - and even when it came to Calvary He cried out: 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?'. What humiliation there is there! I think it was C.I. Schofield said: 'He laid aside the outward insignia of the glory of deity'. He didn't lay aside His deity, neither did He lay aside the glory of deity, neither did He lay aside the attributes of deity - but He laid aside the manifestation of them all.

Now let's look at the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh stoops. The fourth is found in verse 7: 'He took upon Himself the form of a servant' - this is the surrender of the will. The surrender of the will: 'the form of a bondservant', it could be translated. Now this does not mean that He put upon Himself the clothes of a servant, nothing like that. The sense is that He became as completely a servant as He was completely God! Do you see that? We would not dispute this morning that He was absolutely, perfectly God; but in the same sense He was absolutely, perfectly and completely a servant. The Greek word is 'doulos', which spoke of a servant who owned nothing, not even the clothes on his back, everything belonged to his master. You don't need to read too far in the Gospels to find out how our Lord owned no land, no house, no gold, no jewels. He had no business, no boat, no horse - and even when it came to His death He rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey; and when He was crucified, just before it He went up to the upper room which was borrowed; and after He died He was buried in a borrowed tomb.

But it's more than that: He is our servant - and this is marvellous, because we know from Isaiah 53 that the Lord literally has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him! He is made our servant - He is the servant of Jehovah, but He is actually going through crucifixion serving us! He became the servant of Jehovah to fulfil the will of God toward us. People get confused about the garden of Gethsemane, and let me say that I am very confused about a lot of it. But one thing that has been explained to me in these studies in Philippians 2 about where the Lord Jesus says: 'Not my will, but thine be done', is the confusion of some where they say: 'Well, was the Lord's will against the Father's will, that He had to resign Himself to the Father's will?'. No, it wasn't and it couldn't. It wasn't that the Lord didn't want to go to Calvary that He said: 'Not my will, but thine be done' - that was impossible, for He rebuked the disciples for even the insinuation of holding Him back from Calvary. But the point here is this: that the Lord Jesus had a human will, and even His human will that was not opposed to God still had to be surrendered up to God! Do you get it? He learned obedience by the things He suffered, Hebrews says - it's not that His will opposed in any way God's will, but He had a will to give up to God: 'I must always do those things that please Him'.

Now I think you would agree with me that man, as we know it, would rather be a king in a cottage than a servant in a palace. I want you to see this: Jesus, the great Creator who created all things, who ruled all things, who sustained all things by the word of His power, is now stooping to be a servant in His own world, to be controlled by His Father's will and even the will of others! He even stooped to be in subjection to those around Him: the crowd, the blind man, the deaf, the lame, the dead who needed Him and who wanted His help - it's remarkable! Even the disciples, He subjected Himself as the servant to their whims. When they wanted to lean on His breast by faith, as a child would lean on their mother for comfort and help, He was always there for them! It's amazing that in the end - and you mark this, and this is tremendous - He even submitted Himself to His enemies, and at last allowed them to deprive Him of His liberty and of His life. It's a complete and an utter surrender, He yielded all step-by-step, sacrifice by sacrifice, until at last He was led as a Lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is dumb.

Surrender of the will...then there was His earthly position: 'He was in the form of a servant, and was made' - verse 7, the end - 'in the likeness of men'. This is lower still, each step gets lower. He wasn't just a servant, He was - Paul is saying - the lowest of men, the humblest of the race. He suffered the humiliation of human birth! The God that had designed it went through it! He suffered the humility of the feebleness of infancy, He was a little baby in that manger! He didn't become a man in the sense of a pre-fall Adamic man - and you mark this: some people think that the Lord Jesus walked around as Adam walked around before the fall. It wasn't like that at all, let me tell you. I've even heard it said that the Lord Jesus couldn't suffer pain until that last week of His crucifixion, as if God took some kind of cosmic shield away from Him and allowed Him to suffer and know weakness and pain - that is nonsense! He took upon Himself the lowest position of humanity, apart from sin - yet He took upon Himself the frailties, the limitations, the problems, the sufferings that were the heritage of humanity in the fall although He had no sin of His own.

You can see that in the fact that He was hungry, and those were hunger pangs - pains - in the desert 40 days and 40 nights, and if you'd been hungry that long you would know that. He was thirsty, He suffered pain and He felt sadness at the tomb of Lazarus. Like other men He was tired, He was weak, He needed sleep - and Roman says, and here's the verse if you want it: 'He was made in the likeness of' - not pre-fall flesh, but - 'in the likeness of sinful flesh'. He wasn't made like sinful flesh, He wasn't made sinful flesh, but He was made in the likeness of it. What a position: He could have taken the likeness of an unfallen angel, yet the great Creator became passive. In that little manger His own creatures, fallen and sinful, could lift Him up in their arms and set Him down at their own will! What about that? The Creator at the pleasure of others - not a child of royalty, or wealth, or honour; but born among the poor and lowly, of a maiden whose circumstances even threw upon His birth a shadow of suspicion and dishonour, He was called a bastard, the lowest of the low. He made Himself of no reputation.

Why did He do it? Because He must know what our human experiences are - He must! He needed to be perfectly united with man, just as He was and always had been perfectly united to God, because He had to become our merciful High Priest! He had to make intercession for us, and how could He make intercession for us if He never knew what it was like for us? Praise God, He knows, He knows.

The sixth step was obedience right to death: 'Being found in fashion as a man', verse 8, 'he humbled himself, and became obedient right unto death', would be a better translation, because He wasn't obedient to death, death had no hold on Him, but He humbled Himself to be obedient right unto death, He gave Himself up to death. Now He had been obedient already to the pangs of birth in Mary's womb, He had been obedient to Mary and Joseph as His own parents - the God of heaven obedient to them! He had been obedient to Joseph in the carpenter's workshop, to the sweat of employment, and not once did He save Himself from a human agony by the drawing of His divine power - not once. You even go to Matthew chapter 4, to the temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you watch the first and second temptations that came to Him from the devil, and what were they? One: turn these stones to bread; two: cast Yourself off the peak and the angels will give themselves guard over Thee - what where they? They were temptations to get the Christ of God to turn and use His own divine attributes, but He didn't turn to them - why? Because He had to face temptation as a man, not as God! You don't face temptation as God, do you? You face it as a man, and praise God you can be a victor because Christ was the victor before you.

But the final shame, as it were, was He died, He died! He need not have died, because He had no sin, and death is the wages of sin. He said it Himself in John 10:17-18: 'No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again'. In that transfiguration on that Mount of Transfiguration, Christ - you mark this - would have had every right to have turned His back on His disciples, and stepped back into heaven and never saved them at all! But He didn't do it, because He was obedient to death, which was obedient to His Father's will! With calm deliberation and full knowledge of all that awaited Him at Calvary, He bowed His meek head below death's sceptre.

Seventh: His final sacrifice, He was obedient right unto death, even the death of the cross. No illustrious death for the Son of God, no heroic tragedy, but that which was given to the criminal, to the scum of the earth was the death of Jesus the Son of God! They put Him outside the city wall, do you know why? Because a criminal was thought to defile the holy precincts of Jerusalem, and they put Jesus out in case His filth would defile them! What a final sacrifice, between two common thieves as if He Himself was a convict; buried in stranger's grave as if He was worthless. I know and you know that there are thousands of people right across our world this very morning who are willing to sacrifice themselves, blow themselves up, give their whole livelihood for something heroic if it brings them distinction, if they get a halo of heroism and fame around their brow - but there was no fame for Christ!

'Man for man will boldly brave
The terrors of the yawning grave,
And friend for friend, and child for sire,
Undaunted and unmoved expire
For love, or piety, or pride -
But who can die as Jesus died?'

He chose the most degrading, painful form of death - and let me say to you: He could not have gone any lower. Our imaginations could well have put Him in the house of Mary and Martha and Lazarus in Bethany, lying on a bed dying, with Mary wiping His brow, and Martha running in and out and getting His aid, with the window open with the fresh breeze coming from Jerusalem - but that wasn't His death! He chose to be butchered on a cross that He might go as low as He could, that He might bring us as high as He would go! He tasted death for every man so that the great martyrs and reformers, and apostles and disciples of the faith, He could enter into what they went through to be a sympathising Saviour.

Here's the crux of the message: 'Let this mind be in you', that's what Paul said! This consciousness of dignity and voluntary surrender, this complete surrender, this surrender of the will, this lowly earthly position, this obedience right to death, and even the final sacrifice of losing all dignity and having all shame poured upon you. One of the greatest books that have ever been written by a Christian man is that which is called: 'The Imitation of Christ'. My friend, it is a good book and I commend it to you, but let me warn you of this at the end of this study in Philippians 2: that you might as well try and imitate Christ as a canary imitate Pavarotti - it cannot be done. You cannot do it in your own strength, and Christ in this passage is not so much an example, but He is the very power to live this life which is His life. Mark what verse 5 says: 'Let this mind be in you, this mind which was also in Christ Jesus' - His mind, it's His mind! It's not you trying to make your mind like His mind, or your life like His life, but dying to yourself and letting Him live through you.

If there's a truth that needs to be known in Christianity, this is the deepest truth: it is no longer I that live, but Christ that liveth in me. This is the mystery of godliness: Christ in you, the hope of glory. Do you want humility, esteeming others better than yourself? Submit to Christ and let His life live through you! Do you want love? Well, open your heart to a baptism of love from the Son of God - His love. If you want patience it will have to be His patience; courage, His courage; wisdom, His wisdom - whatever it is, it's got to be His! You might think: 'Well, this is very confusing' - well, I'll tell you it's not, because it clears up a lot of problems, you know why? Because it makes things less complicated: all you need is Christ!

Great simplicity, not 101 steps, just one: Christ. It takes all complications out of it, that you're not watching yourself and your steps, but you're keeping your eyes on the Lord Jesus, and you're abiding in the Vine, and you're letting the Vine live through your life because you're dead, and He is life in you! Do you get it? The way to be exalted is what Jesus did: 'Wherefore God hath also highly exalted Him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord'. My friend, if you want to be exalted it must be the way of the cross. This passage is teaching you that the way up is the way down, the way to win is the way to lose, the way to strength is the way of weakness, the way to glory is the way of shame, the way to life is the way of death - and this is God's law of recompense, because nobody ever stooped so low and no-one was ever exalted so high!

The greatest step He took led to the greatest honour that anyone ever had, and I want you to mark - we don't have time to lineate this - but there were seven steps down, and there were also seven steps up. Seven is the number of perfection as you know, and that speaks that perfect humiliation and submission and surrender will lead to perfect exaltation, and He had it! He had it. Brethren and sisters, such a mind must be in us, we must be willing to lay aside our ambition, our own glory and self-seeking, our little thrones of comfort, respect, to serve others in the church and in the lost world. There are plenty of us like the two who would sit at the right hand

and the left hand of Christ in the kingdom, but He says if we want that we must drink of His cup, we must be baptised with the baptism that He is baptised with.

Paul could say in his great epistle to the Corinthians: 'I think also that I have the mind of Christ' - do we? I'll leave you with this little piece called 'Others':

'Lord help me live from day to day
In such a self-forgetful way,
That even when I kneel to pray
My prayer shall be for others.

Help me in all the work I do
To ever be sincere and true;
And know that all I do for thee
Must needs be done for others.

Let self be crucified and slain
And buried deep, and all in vain
May efforts be to rise again,
Unless to live for others.

And when my work on earth is done,
And my new work in Heaven's begun,
May I forget the crown I won
While thinking still of others.

Others, Lord, yes others,
Let this my motto be,
Help me to live for others
That I may live like Thee'.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the massive step, the immeasurable, unquantifiable step that Christ took when He left Thy right hand and came and walked among men. Lord, we are only paddling at the water's edge this morning, and we pray that we will be given a deeper appreciation - but, our Father, we have found out that Thy will is that we should have a deeper appreciation, when we ourselves suffer the same humiliation that He suffered. Lord, help us always to be a people that step down, that God may raise us up again. Help us to be a people that love one another, and esteem one another better than ourselves in lowliness of mind. Lord, help us all to realise today that we ought not to go away and try to be imitators of this example, but that we should die, and allow Christ to live in us - mind, body, soul and spirit, that our attitude may be that of Christ Jesus. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 13

"The Christian Life Turned Inside Out"

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Philippians 2:12-13

I want you to turn with me to Philippians chapter 2, and we have been in this little epistle now for ten weeks or so, on and off, and we've been in chapter 2 for approximately half of that period. We're taking up verses 12 and 13, and I want speak to you this morning on 'The Christian Life Turned Inside Out', the Christian life turned inside out. Remember everything that we've studied and read so far, and then Paul takes up the train of thought: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye 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. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and", to work, or, "to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain".

Mark Twain, that great American author who of course you will know I hope, was not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ said these very true words: 'Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example'. Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example. What is the thinking behind Mark Twain's remarks? I think, probably he was saying that the annoyance of a good example is in our inability to achieve the status of that example, to accomplish the standard that that example gives to us. Of course, what greater example could we have than that given in this passage, where the Lord Jesus is spoken of as being in the form of God, yet thought it not something to be grasped to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation and emptied Himself - in many of His capacities in the Godhead, He voluntarily gave up His prerogative and right to use them, He could have used them but He didn't grasp out towards them. He came as a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and was made obedient unto death, right unto death - even the death of the cross. Then there came that wonderful glorious exultation that resulted from the depths that He went down into, where God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that one day at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.

Now, that portion of Christological theology that is so glorious and majestic in its language is given to us not just for our theological pondering and contemplation. You will remember that it was given to the church at Philippi, first and foremost as an example of the humility that you and I and the Philippians are to have towards one another as Christians, and that's enshrined in the plea that was given in verses 1 to 4: 'Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory', verse 4, 'Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others'. The plea to look for others good before our own. Then the pattern is given in verses 5 through to 11, the Lord Jesus, He is that example.

Now we would be forgiven, perhaps, at the end of all those studies - and seeing what the apostle and the Holy Spirit, by inference, is requiring of us as saints, the type of humility that our Lord Jesus had - to stand back and say: 'Well, this is impossible! How could I possibly do the likes of that? Paul may plea, he may give me the pattern, but what is the process, where is the power to live a life like this?'. Now the process and the power is found, we will see today, in verses 12 and 13. Paul takes it up by saying: 'Wherefore', or 'So then, beloved, as ye 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'. 'So then', because of what you have learnt - he's carrying on from chapter 1 and verse 27, if you look at it for a moment, where he said similar words: 'Let your conversation', or your way of life, 'be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel'.

You've to clothe yourselves in the garments of salvation that become Jesus Christ, that show forth gloriously Jesus Christ in all of His splendour and humility and exaltation, not detract from what the Gospel is meant to speak of. The same thing is really what he's saying as he's finished this great discourse on the humiliation of our Lord in chapter 2: 'So then, because of this, wherefore, even if I'm with you or if I'm not with you, you've got to obey these words that I have spoken'. Now if you look at verse 12 for a moment, in affection he calls them 'beloved' as he often does in his epistles because he's trying, if you like, to cushion with sympathy the exhortation that he's going to give to them. 'Beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only', now let's stop there for a moment, because right away we're seeing that these Philippian believers, when Paul was with them and when he in his apostolic authority gave them an instruction, they obeyed Paul. Of course, the apostles had the prerogative of God to do things like this, but I want you to see that Paul is commending them here that when he was in their midst, and he gave them a command, they obeyed it as from the Lord, without any question whatsoever. Incidentally, in the light of what this passage has already been speaking about, he's saying: 'You mirrored the humility of Christ, because He was obedient, He was the bondsman to the will of His Father, and so as I have come to you and brought you the commands of God, you have obeyed me when I have been present with you'.

So he's telling them, and commending them where commendation is due, that they did this when he was with them. But now he's going a step further, you see it in verse 12: 'But I want you to do this not as in my presence only'. The word for 'presence' is the Greek 'parousia' (sp?) that is often used of the second coming of our Lord Jesus when His presence will be with His people. But the sense is: 'I want you to do this the way you did it when I was with you, when I'm not with you'. The sense of this word 'parousia' is not just 'presence', but 'being influenced by' - or you could translate it 'being helped by'. Let's look at it again, Paul is saying: 'It's commendable that you humbled yourselves to the obedience of my commands which were from the Spirit of God when I was with you, when I was there to influence you, when I was there to help you - but I want you to go on a step further, and now that I'm not there you're to do the same. Now that I'm not there to influence you, now that I'm not there to help you, but now how much more you need to do it in my absence' - *apousia* (sp?), 'ap' meaning 'away from' - 'now that I'm away from you, my influence is away from you'.

The problem was that Paul suspected, and I think rightly so, that the Philippians obedience was dependent upon the great apostle's presence, bodily, with them. In one sense it was easy for them to do what Paul said when Paul was there, and when Paul's eyes could see and ears could hear what they were doing and what they were saying. But now Paul is saying: 'You got to be not dependent on me, but realise more your dependence on Christ; because faith is the dependence upon things not seen' - *apousia* - 'things that are not present, when you're away from any godly influence whatsoever, when you do the will of God' - and he's going on a step further to encourage them by saying that all is sufficient to do the will of God is the presence of Christ in you.

Of course they were discouraged, as we saw in weeks gone by, that the apostle was in prison. They were liable to be cast down because their leader was gone, and Paul is trying to encourage them: 'No, you're not dependent upon me, you're not just to be obedient when I'm with you, and when my influence and help is given to you, but all the more it's needed now when I'm not there! When the world is looking on and they're looking to see if this is real or it's just enshrined in some kind of hierarchy of apostolic authority, men looking to men!'. You see the Philippians were in danger of becoming what I have called 'proxy Christians'. They tended to lean on Paul too much. They leant on his strength, they were bold in his presence, but now that he's away they're weak, they're fearful in his absence. Really, if we could colloquialise it in our language, we could say Paul was saying: 'Look, you've got to learn now to stand on your own two feet'.

Not that we need to be independent of one another in the body of Christ - we know that that can't be the case - or that we don't need one another...this epistle, if it's saying anything, it's saying the opposite: there needs to be this unity of love and dependence on one another. But what Paul is saying is that the actual intrinsic crux, the

centre of the gravity of our faith and how we live in an outward sense to the world around us, has to be dependent alone on Christ - because all around us changes, where He changes not. You see, you can be dependent on your wife's faith, if it's stronger than yours you can be dependent on that. You can be dependent on your husband's leading in the home, and because you know he's a strong Christian you depend on his decisions and his leading rather than ultimately depending on God. Those two things are not wrong in themselves, but it is what they are to the expense of depending upon God chiefly.

You can depend on your church's reputation. We've always believed the truth, and we stand foursquare on the word of God and the gospel of God, and somehow you put your head on that as a pillow of faith and rest - but if I was to ask you what would happen if these four walls, and the people that really are the church of Jesus Christ, were dispersed and gone overnight, and there was no Iron Hall or whatever assembly you belong to, where would your faith be? How would you be identified in the world around you? What would your witness be? People sometimes think, when there's no Pastor, that a work can't go on - I think this is the error that we see right here in the Philippians, that they thought that this one man could do everything. Other churches we see fall around the seams when the great personality that founded them, or that everybody gathered to, dies, passes on - the work depletes and diminishes because they're looking to a man.

Some say that 'The Pastor, the workers, missionaries, let them work out my salvation for me. It's enough that he does the praying, he does the reading of God's word and the witnessing, I'll pay towards his support - but he can be my proxy'. I'm not saying anybody's doing this here, I'm only trying to illustrate to you that this is the danger the Philippians were in danger and peril of falling into, where they were saying: 'Let this man Paul be my security and work out my salvation. When I've a problem I go to Paul, when there's a problem in the church we go to Paul, when we need some guidance we go to Paul'. Some go a step further, and in a more spiritual capacity say: 'Well, I won't look to a man to work out my salvation for me, let God be Christian for me. Let God be Christian for me'. In other words, 'I will do nothing, it's enough for me to be saved, now let God do the rest'. That is equally as bad, and I'll tell you why: because the result of those two attitudes is that neither of those people work at or work out their salvation, because they're relying on props.

I wonder have you any props today, or who's helping you, or who you're relying on, or whose influence really makes you tick and keeps you going - but if that person, or that influence, or that help was no longer there, well, who knows what could really happen? Or perhaps even recently those props, or helps, or influences that you have had have been taken away, and sometimes God does that in order to let us see that we're not to rely on any of these things, even good things! We're to rely wholly and completely on Him.

Now there are two applications that we could give to these two verses this morning. There is a church application, because as a church Paul felt that they were in danger of using him as a prop, so God took their prop away and God put him in prison, God locked him up. We know from chapter 4 and verse 2 that there was potential division within the assembly, and that was an occasion that likely, if Paul was with them, they would have went to Paul right away and Paul would have sorted it all out. He would have worked out their salvation, their deliverance from this problem, and their witness would have been safeguarded in the society, and there wouldn't have been a split in the church, and the Christians wouldn't have been backbiting and fighting and all the rest. But Paul is not with them, and it is God's way, Paul is saying, that assembly problems are dealt with from within. But we know, and we have known through church history, that assemblies tend not to do this, but they run to their leaders and they appeal to their leaders.

Now don't get me wrong, there have to be leaders within the church, and as we've gone through Corinthians we've seen that very clearly: that there ought to be overseers. But we also saw, particularly in that passage to do with discipline, chapter 5 if memory serves me correctly, that there are things that ought not to even be brought to the oversight - because God's way is that those things be dealt with first and foremost between you and your brother who has offended you or you who have offended them. Do you see that? These things ought to be sorted out primarily, and you might say idealistically, from within and between those who are the offended parties.

Now you can see how, I think, in church history, the clergy and laity system evolved - where men felt: 'Well, I can't sort this thing I myself', and they ran to a cleric or to a religious leader, and so esteemed that religious leader that they were exalted over the ordinary people. Men like Diotrephes, who loved to have the pre-eminence; like the cult of the Nicolaitans, who esteemed this laity and clergy division between ordinary people and those who are in the pulpit, those who are the ministers. Now this was simply because the early believers found that it was generally easier to appeal to a noted preacher or teacher for help than to cast themselves wholly upon God, and look into the word of God through prayer for a way ahead.

You might think: 'Well, what are you getting at?'. Well, let me personalise it, it applies to the church, but it applies to all of us here today because we can just make ourselves naked before the face of God in His word at this particular moment, when we just ask the question: who do you run to first of all when you need help? Where do you go first? Do you go to your spouse? Your parents? Your best friend? Your solicitor? Your banker? Your Pastor? Or do we go to God? Do we rely on others? It's not that we don't need others. Now some people will argue, and maybe this is what's going over in your head at this moment: 'Well, that's alright, but ordinary people are too ignorant to settle these matters. The ordinary people can't sort these things out, you have to look to other people'. Well I would agree with you that there are certain circumstances, and that's why there have been leaders appointed within the church - but ideally, and let me say that the word of God, although you might think it's idealistic, it was given to men and women who are equally as fallible and sinful as you and me, and they were expected to obey it! They, in Philippi, have the word of God and have the Spirit of God, and we have the word of God and we have Spirit of God, and can I ask you: what more do leaders have than the word of God and the Spirit of God? They don't have any more! I grant you, God gifts them in peculiar ways at times - you might say very peculiar! - but nevertheless God has given us all the word of God and the Spirit of God to be led in these particular differences and issues that may arise. But what is usually lacking is the necessary humility, and here's Paul's point, to wait on God - and if necessary, God's leading doesn't go my way, to humble myself before God and to take it! I think that's where the loophole comes, and we all fall foul.

It's not that we ignore other's advice and judgement, but what Paul is saying is that we're not to be reliant on that, we're to be relying on God. When we're reliant on God, verse 14, we'll do all things without murmurings and disputings, we'll be blameless and harmless as sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation among whom ye shine as lights in the world. We will be seen to be something different: 'Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain'. Paul is speaking personally now, he's saying: 'If you do this, I'll not regret all the effort I put into you at the judgement seat of Christ, because I'll get a greater reward!'

Now I want to spend the remaining moments that we have on the personal application of these two verses. It's twofold, verse 12: the Christian's workout; and verse 13: the Lord's work-in. The Christian's workout, let's look at that first of all. 'Work out your own salvation', now people say: 'Well, here it is, proof that salvation is by works. You can preach all you like about grace and faith and so on, and doing nothing to be saved, but here it is in black-and-white: work out your salvation'. Now is this text talking about the saving of your soul from eternal damnation? It's clearly not, because if you look at it, it says: 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling', it doesn't say: 'work for your salvation with fear and trembling', but 'work it out'. Work it out!

There was little girl once listening to a preacher who was preaching on this text, and saying it's not by grace, it's not by faith - you need grace and you need faith to help you along the way, but you've got to meet God half-way. He was really saying that it's not by grace alone that we are saved - and the little girl tugged the arm of her mother, and said: 'Mother, how can you work it out if it hasn't got in?'. How can you work it out if you haven't got it in? Do you see the difference here? It has to be in before you can work it out. This is the primary difference between Christianity, Bible believing Christianity, and the religions of this world - because religion is an attempt to work in, rather than let God work something in, you're trying to work the thing in.

It's the difference of trying to affect a change inside you, rather than allowing God to be the cause of the change from without into you. It's the difference between effort rather than grace. What Paul is really saying is that this salvation has been given to you as a gift, it is the divine life that is in you, Christ's very spirit has been implanted in your spirit. He said on another occasion: 'For me to live is Christ, my life is the life of Christ resurrected!'. Now he's exhorting these Christians: work out that salvation, work out that life day by day.

Of course 'salvation' has many meanings, and I think it could almost be understood in this verse as meaning your progressive sanctification, as you strive toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus - ultimately your reward in heaven. Not salvation, but your reward that you will get at the judgement seat of Christ. This can't be speaking about salvation, because it's not talking to individuals in the first place, it's talking to the assembly, it's talking about how they are seen outwardly - really that's what 'salvation' means in its literal sense, that when you move from Egypt into Canaan, people see that you've moved from the slave market of sin into the land of promise of God. They can see the difference! You're saved in their eyes because they see it! That's what he's talking about.

Well, how is your workout going, Christian? How are you working out what God has implanted in you? Let me tell you a very interesting story: one of the most remarkable characters in the United States history was a man called George Washington Carver. He was born a slave, and on one occasion he was traded as a little boy for a horse. Let me read an account: 'Years ago before the slaves were free, a little six month-old negro boy was stolen with other slaves from his owner. Moses Carver, who lived near Diamond Grave, Missouri, became a professor eventually in Tuskegee University. He held degrees of Bachelor and Master of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce of Great Britain. He was also a musician, he once toured the mid-West US as a concert pianist. He was a painter, he had exhibited at the world's greatest fairs - but the most surprising thing about him was his ability to make things out of nothing'. Wait until you hear this! 'He was able to paint out of clay, he could make marble out of wood shavings, starch, paste, vinegar, ink, shoe blackening; caramels out of sweet potatoes' - could you do this? 'He made butter, oil, cheese, dye, face powder, breakfast food, printers ink, pickles, instant coffee, axle grease, and 276 other things out of peanuts'. In spite of his background Professor Carver said, listen to this: 'When you do common things in an uncommon way, you will command the attention of the world'.

That's what Paul is saying, when your life has changed so that you work out your salvation in such a way that the world stands back and sees you doing everyday, mundane, ordinary things, but with the glory and humility of Christ, they will take note. Professor Carver was recognised and registered as a genius, a real genius, but he didn't profess to be a genius. In fact he attributed all his success to God, this is what he said: 'Whatever I did I was doing it because God had already placed the possibility of it in my nature. I'm only doing what God told me to do'. He's doing, literally, in the physical realm what Paul is exhorting these Christians in Philippi to do in the spiritual realm - to dig deep, and to dig out what God has put in there! To work it out, and you know that right across this world there are vast resources of natural wealth and minerals that lie within the earth, and they are being taken out day by day, and at a rate of billions of pounds and dollars per year - but there's no miner can work under the earth for gold or diamonds or copper, which has not already been put down under there by the Creator of the universe! He can only work out what God has put in!

The ancient scholar Strabo, who lived in 64-62BC, was a Roman who wrote in the Greek language. In one of his accounts of the famous silver mine in Spain he refers to this phrase 'working out', and he uses identically the same phrase as Paul uses. What Strabo was describing where the Romans who operated an exploiting system and got, if you like, raped and exhausted totally the utmost value of those mines of everything that was in them. Now they owned them all, but they still exhausted everything they could out of them! That's the sense of this word. I tell you believer: God has put within your spirit a power that is greater than all the hydrogen bombs that this world could ever imagine. Paul's question is: are you working it out? The Greek word that he uses is 'categoismai' (sp?) - it's a working with diligent labour, the sense is 'fully developed maturity'. It's saying don't

stop half-way, don't be content with partial salvation, follow your salvation to its ultimate conclusion. It's the working out of a maths student with a formula until he gets the conclusion arithmetically - he gets the answer, and he stays at it until he gets it!

In verse 13 the word he uses for 'work' is a different word: 'God worketh in you'. The work that God does in us is a word that we get our word in English 'energy' from. It's talking about the power that was put in you when you were first regenerated and saved. God has put this supernatural power in you, but you're to get that power within you and you're to work at it and work on it and work it out! Do you see the difference? Maybe it's confusing you. Well, let me illustrate it like this: a beautiful sun in the sky on this February Lord's Day morning, and as it comes down you maybe have even noticed that the little spring flowers are even now starting to sprout. That is a source outside of the flower, it's an 'energae' (sp?), if you like, an energy like the word in verse 13 that God works in us, what He's put in us. It's coming down from the sun, and that little flower imbibes it, but that little flower starts to work with what God has given it. It works out petals and pollen, and perfume and fruit, and all sorts of beautiful colours, because it takes what God has given it and it works it out.

That's what Paul is saying: to work out with God has worked in, with conscious effort. Not to 'let go and let God', as we often hear, but to take hold of God by His grace and to work out what He has worked in with fear and trembling, realising the potential that we have to sin and to fall into sin, realising the necessity that we have of God and His grace and His power - but in that trembling obedience, and that phrase 'in fear and trembling' is always used in the New Testament of obedience, yet we obey God and go forward to maturity! Not to a partial salvation, but to enter into the fullness of everything that God has already worked in us.

Can I ask you: how are you working out as a Christian? Well, verse 13, let me encourage you as we close, talks about the Lord working in: 'For it is God which worketh in you'. The emphasis in the Greek language is especially on the word 'God'. 'It is God which worketh in you', it's not just your own doing. You don't have to rely on your own strength - thank God for that, for I have very little strength, and the Lord has reminded me in the week that has gone by: 'If thou fail in the day of adversity, thy strength indeed is small', and it is. But isn't it wonderful to know that God has worked into us an 'energo', an energy, where He's not only our holy companion but He is in us, the Lord of the galaxies, the King of the constellations, the One who has created the continents, who carved out the seabeds and filled them with the rains, the God of the centuries and the ages is at work in us!

What pattern is He working to? Oh, my friends, it's the pattern that He gave us in this very chapter: 'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren'. I wonder do people look at you and say: 'God is at work in that man or woman'. I'm led to believe that in the area of Pasadena, California, Albert Einstein years ago moved out his residence there. He lived in a modest and unpretentious home. Immediately he moved out that house became the object of great interest, and people drove past it in their cars, and they walked by it on foot, and they stood outside it - why? Why all the interest? Because Albert Einstein was at work in that house! What attention should we give to the fact that God is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure, carrying out His eternal will?

I'm almost finished. Just listen to me for a moment, because I'm conscious that there could be people here struggling with sin and temptation. Trying to be humble, trying to do what is written down in this passage that the Lord has given us as an example. Well, you have to die, and allow, in obedience, Christ to live out that life in you - but it's not without your cooperation. Let me illustrate it this way: in the city of New York, when they were building one of their east river bridges, during the construction the engineers were sinking the deep caissons - which, if you don't know, is a watertight chamber in which underwater construction can be done in a dry space - trying to put this down under the water level, and they encountered a sunken hulk, and old barge that just wouldn't budge no matter what they did, it had become so securely embedded in the river that the engine's cables were all powerless to remove it. At that point of defeat in the operation, when they thought there's no power that can move this, there was a young man who was fresh from technical engineering school, and he said: 'Well, can I have permission to look at this case?'. After studying the problem he asked for permission to try his

plan. When he was given a permission he got an even bigger barge, and he put it on the water surface right at the spot that the barge under the water was buried. He took chains and fastened these huge chains under the water to the sunken hulk of the barge beneath the ground. Then they all watched in astonishment, because as the tide began to rise in the river there came this irresistible energy and power as the surface barge rose with the swelling tide, and lifted the submerged wreck - why? Because the young engineer made use of the limitless natural power of the ocean tides.

Paul says: 'Child of God, work out your salvation and make use of the power that God has put in you, and is working in you, to fulfil His will according to His good pleasure'. I'll tell you, if you have a God-linked life, that doesn't mean you meet God half-way and He'll meet you halfway, it means this: you give all and God will give all - His power will be demonstrated to the world all around that He is working in you, for we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus. That word 'workmanship' means 'poem', we get 'poem' from it in our English language - and think of it: God is transposing a poem through your life, my life, combining them altogether. One day He will combine every child of God together in glory in a great symphonic poem of praise to the glory of the divine Creator who is worthy, and He's worthy of it now as He will be worthy of it then.

How are you working out your salvation? Maybe it hasn't happened too much yet, but can I encourage you to know what God has worked into you, and that you'll go away today and begin to work it out.

Our Father, we thank Thee for putting such a dynamic power deep within our hearts that is the very resurrection power that raised our Lord Jesus from the dead. But Lord, I must confess, and I don't believe that I'm alone, that I have not worked that power out to the best of my ability, but Lord, oh one day what that will be when that power will be transfigured in all of its ability. Oh Lord, when this corruption shall give up into incorruption, and we will shine for the glory of Christ for all eternity. Lord, help us as we see that day approaching, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and that in us You will do Your work according to Your good pleasure. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 14

"Silent Lights"

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Philippians 2:14-16

Now we're turning to Philippians chapter 2 again. Of course last week we were looking at the Christian life inside out, and we looked at what it is to work out our salvation, as verse 12 tells us, the Christian workout - and the fact that we work out our salvation because God is the one who worketh in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure. There was the Christian's workout and God's work-in. The portion that we're looking at this morning, verses 14 to 16, speaks of silent lights, silent lights.

Verse 14: "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain".

I think all of you will know that lights, generally, don't make any noise, but lights burn. They don't make a noise, but they send forth an effulgence. You heard our brother George Bates recently telling the story of a friend of his who was asked to go and mend a doorbell for an 84 year-old woman. Of course, you men know what it's like when you're asked to do something, and you put it on the back burner for a little while - then it becomes a long while, and eventually the wife nagged, and nagged, and nagged at him, and he decided: 'I better go round and fix this lady's bell'. When he got round to the woman's house, of course he knocked at the door, and when she came to the door she said: 'My bell's broke, it's totally broke, I need a new bell. You can try and fix it, but as far as I'm concerned I need a new bell'. Lo and behold, he tried to ring it and it wasn't working. So he got a screwdriver out and started to take it apart, and he found that all that was wrong with the bell was a flat battery. So he got the little woman in her living room and said: 'No, it's alright, it is working'. She says: 'No, I'm sorry, but it's not working!'. She said: 'I've tried to ring it, other people tried to ring it, it's not working'. He said: 'You don't understand me, it is working, but you've a flat battery. All you need to do is go down to the local corner shop, and with a few pounds buy a new battery, and I'll fit the new battery and everything will be alright again - your bell will ring once more'. As soon as he said that, she said to him: 'Well, could you get me one for that light on the ceiling there, because that burns every hour of every day and it's costing me a fortune?'. The man says: 'No, dear, I can't get you a battery for that light because it takes more power to shine a light than to ring a bell'. It takes more power to shine a light than to ring a bell.

Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying to you today, it's good to be vocal in our Christian lives and we're exhorted to. In recent portions of this book we've been told how Paul was encouraging these Philippian believers, from prison, to go out and not be fearful, but to tell people of the love of Jesus no matter what the consequences of suffering might be for them. But what Paul is coming to now here in these verses is that shining a light is more superior than making a noise. It is right to make a noise, it's right to be vocal, but we ought not to do that at the exception of letting the light of the Gospel and the life of Christ shine from ours.

It's important to be vocal in our Christian faith, but what Paul is now touching in these verses that we're looking at today is that often Christians are vocal, but what vibrates from the Christians mouth and lips is not the voice of praise, not the voice of proclamation and the preaching of the Gospel, but the voice of complaint - the voice of grumblings and murmurings as he puts it in verse 14. When there should be emanating from the life of the child of God to this dark world the light of the Gospel, the light of a holy life and the hope that they have through Christ, what comes forth is a barrage of moaning, groaning, grumbling, complaining, fault-finding and censoriousness.

Having thought about this in the week that has gone by, I have a theory that those who make the most noise complaining are doing it in some strange way to compensate for the lack of light in their life. There's no real fire in their bosom, the life of God isn't emanating from their lives in such a way that people can stop and say: 'There is a man that shows the life of Christ'. So they have to complain about other people in order for others to take note of them. They're vocal in their complaining because, maybe consciously or subconsciously, they're trying to distract from others seeing that they aren't shining. I don't know whether you accept that: that instead of shining they are shouting, and hope that people won't be able to tell the difference. Maybe they're not just trying to convince other people, it could be that they're trying to convince themselves that complaining compensates for a lack of real fire and light.

I happen to believe that it is those with no real vital relationship with Christ - I'm not saying they're not saved, but they're not walking day by day in communion and dependence upon Christ - there's this void in their life, there's this emptiness that can only be filled with fellowship and communion with Christ, but they try to fill it with some kind of little crusade or gripe. This thing takes the place of Christ in their life, and they begin to convince themselves: 'This thing makes me spiritual!'. It may be that that thing of itself is spiritual, but these type of people believe that this will substitute the light of God in your heart and shining out to the world around you, and it does not! In fact, I believe as we go deeper and analyse the motivations behind believers who complain, who groan, who moan, who murmur and grumble, we find that Paul is really saying - now remember the context of the rest of what we've studied in this passage, the wondrous condescension of the Lord Jesus as He came from heaven to earth, as He stooped, thought it not something to be grasped at to be seen as God and to behave as God, but made Himself of no reputation, humbled Himself - you know all the rest, we've looked into it in great depth. But what Paul is really saying here is that those who grumble and complain are trying to pull others down, that they might exalt themselves. Do you see it?

They're not humbling themselves, they're not doing what he instructed in verse 3, look at it: 'Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others'. Rather than build others up, and lift and exalt others, they're pulling them down so that they by default might be exalted. I hope you can see the connection - and what doesn't help this in the life of Christians is the fact that we are programmed in our society today to be discontent. The media and advertising encourages us to be discontent with the way things are, to want something more, to want something else. It seems, as you study society and civilisation, that the more affluent a society gets the more discontent it gets. The more it has, the more it wants. We're bombarded with this fantasy world through the television, the movies, and advertising - the media continually assaults our senses with these alluring images, and often unrealistic pictures of what we can be if we had their product!

This type of plastic perfection that they purport to us to be the norm, it tells us - and there can be times that we let it in - 'This is what you should be, this is what you should have', and we make the false assumption and formula and equation that: 'If I had that', or, 'If I looked like that', or, 'If I'd be like that, I will be happy'. When we get those things, or perhaps don't get those things, we don't become happy, we become discontent. Discontent then breeds impatience, and you would know that impatience is a defining characteristic of our day. If someone pulls in front of you on the motorway, or at the traffic lights, you no longer beep the horn and maybe find people doing rude signs to you, now you go into your boot and lift a baseball bat and break their legs! Road rage! Because people, more and more, are getting impatient because their discontent has made them such. You don't need to go to those who commit road rage to see it, you can see it even in the church of Jesus Christ where this consumer culture has become more common. That's why, today more than ever, there are more churches splitting in our land than we have ever known - believers fighting and bickering with one another, and usually it's coming from the seed of complaining and malcontents in the assembly which is more and more common today.

People leave the church because the music's not fancy enough, or their children prefer a more modern church where their friends go to. Maybe it's a minor disagreement with the policy in the church, or the leadership in the church - but what we are finding today is a consumer ideal in the church of Jesus Christ: 'If I don't like something, well I'll leave it and I'll go to something I like better if it doesn't give me the buzz, if it makes me discontent'. But we find that most of these Christians that operate in this way are always discontent, and are always moving around churches because they never find that happiness. I say to us as a church today, if we promote an entertainment atmosphere - as many churches are today - we will be continually trying to meet the felt needs, the whims of those people who thrive on that and who find their contentment in it.

You see, there's a great danger here, because if we cater to felt needs and whims we operate on a superficial level, and we supply the demand of those people who are yearning in expectations for the things which, I would say, are purely sensual. Let me give you an illustration: I like music. I mightn't like the type of music that you like, and you mightn't like the music that I like, but I like music and I've got quite a few compact discs. What would happen to me is, when somebody gives me a new compact disc - and I was saying this to somebody this week who give me two - I will listen to that. I'll listen to it over and over again and again, if I like it of course, over and over again and again and again and again until I'm absolutely sick of it! Then I'll throw it in the corner, and maybe a year from now or six months from now, I'll look down all the CDs that I haven't listened to in a while, and then I'll put it on - and then I'll do the same again. I'll listen and listen and listen and listen again, and it's a purely sensual thing - there's nothing wrong with it, but all that it is is: I continually need this satisfaction, and I get this satisfaction until I become discontent, and when I become discontent I need something new! If I operate in the spiritual realm in this kind of sensual capacity, felt needs, the whims, the expectations on a superficial level, I will be continually trying to meet that need. As a church, if we do that, we will be continually changing and never be able to satisfy people!

You see, the church isn't meant to operate on a superficial level, it's meant to operate on a spiritual level - because to do anything else actually leads to discontent, complaining, and eventually to impatience. That's why the biblical command is so clear: do not complain! Don't complain! Now, if you are familiar with the Old Testament, you will know that the people of God have been shamefully known for this sin. Perhaps they have been known for it more than the world, and it could be the case today that this is the sin that we could level at number one - public enemy number one - in the church: to complain. Adam complained against God before Satan - you remember then, God said: 'Adam, where are you?', and Adam said: 'Well, it's not my fault, it's the woman that You gave me'. Then the woman complained that Adam encouraged her, and also the serpent beguiled her. There is this culture of blame right from the very beginning of time. Then Cain is punished for slaying his brother Abel, and he complains that this punishment is too great: 'I cannot bear it!'. He complains against God's judgement upon him. You find that the nation of Israel, when they're delivered from Egypt, we see them praising God and singing Psalms unto God, but what we often forget is that three days later they are complaining about the waters of Marah being too bitter to drink. So God brings them to a place called Elam, which is an oasis of rest, of sustenance, of quenching of their thirst - and they complain in Elam that God hasn't provided any food for them!

When faithless spies come back from the promised land to give their report that was dire and dismal and depressing, they complained again: 'Are you going to bring us into this place to be killed?'. When God gave them bread from heaven, the food of the angels, they complained that they were getting sick of it, and they were harping back to the garlic and the onions and the leeks of Egypt. Let me show you an illustration of this to show you that this isn't a new phenomenon. Numbers 14, Numbers 14, and you can see the pattern of complaining here, but what I want you to see is that their complaining became contagious, it spread. Verse 2: 'And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us

return into Egypt'. Verse 10: 'But all the congregation bade stone them with stones', that's Moses and Aaron, 'And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel'.

One Israelite started complaining, and then he complained to another, and the other agreed with him. Then they began complaining to everyone around them, and before we know it they're actually lifting up stones to stone the leaders that God had put over them - because their complaining had led them to be discontent, and then they found themselves impatient and they took the thing into their own hands. Paul, when he refers to that particular incident in 1 Corinthians 10, if you look at it, verses 9 and 10, says these words: 'Neither let us test Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer'.

When we go into the book of Jude we find there also that the mark of the apostate in verse 16 of Jude is: 'These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage'. Now why am I bringing all these references to your attention? It's simply to show you that to complain against the Lord, or to complain against the Lord's people is a very serious matter! It has dogged the people of God from the very beginning of time, and it's still with the people of God today - we could turn to James 5, 1 Peter 4, and the apostles there again are telling us: 'Do not complain, it is a grievous sin against God'.

So we have the command in our verse: 'Do all things without murmurings or disputings' - stop complaining. Let's break this up for a moment: 'Do all things'. That's remarkable, because there are sometimes that we feel that we've got grounds, and we're warranted, we're legitimate in our moaning and our complaining - but Paul is saying you shouldn't complain. As you work out your salvation, of course, as you're moving toward heaven, the only noise that you should be making is praise to God! Not complaining! Chapter 4 and verse 4 that we'll look at later, it bears it out, Paul says: 'Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice'. This is a man who is locked in prison, and he's saying: 'There's no warrant or justification at all for the child of God to be a moan!'.

All things should be done without murmuring, without disputing. Now let's look at these two words. The first word 'murmuring' could be translated 'grumbling'. It's from a Greek word, now listen to it carefully, 'gongusmosai' (sp?), which is an onomatopoeic word - that simply means a word that sounds like what it's describing. You've heard of a 'gong', haven't you? A gong, a big clang - and you have this word 'gongusmosai', and Paul is using a word that really describes in its sound the guttural muttering sounds that people make when they're complaining. I don't know whether you've ever seen the cartoon 'Dastardly and Muttley', but the wee dog when he gets into bother and doesn't like what's going on, he makes that noise - you've heard him. It's that sort of expression that comes deep down from in your being, that you grumble, you murmur, you complain. This word is used in John 7 of those who murmured and plotted against the Lord Jesus Christ. It's used in Acts chapter 6 of Christians who were complaining that as the alms were being distributed among the saints, that there was some kind of racism that the Jews were getting more than the Gentiles - and from that there had to be appointed deacons. It's this grumbling that is not immune from the people of God, and it's the same word that was used in 1 Corinthians 10:10 that we looked at, of the Old Testament saints murmuring against Moses. Their murmuring led to discontent, their discontent led to impatience that made them bend down, lift a rock, ready to kill Moses and Aaron.

The next word 'disputing' is from a Greek word 'dialogismos' (sp?), and this is a little bit different because it's inner reasoning. It's complaining in your mind and in your heart - you see the likeness 'dialogue', it's like talking with yourself. If grumbling is an emotional thing, where these deep guttural sounds of moaning and murmuring come, this is an intellectual moaning. It's like an arguing, maybe with yourself: 'I don't deserve that, I'm going to get my own back', or maybe even an arguing with God: 'Lord, this isn't right! Why is this happening to me? This isn't fair!'. But what Paul is really trying to get at is that both of these things, the emotional grumbling and the intellectual disputing and debating with yourself and God, all flow from pride.

You have to remember that Paul was talking into a society where among the philosophers, particularly those who followed Aristotle, they were filled with such a pride and a debating spirit, they would sit in the marketplaces and debate this that and the other thing - worthless nonsense. But they took pride in their ability to dispute, to complain, to murmur, and this thing was an epidemic in the city of Philippi where Paul is writing to.

I wonder do we ever complain against God? God asks us, perhaps, to do something; or maybe one of God's servants asks us to do something; and that thing costs us, and we begin to feel the price of what we're doing: do we grumble, and do we say in our minds: 'Well, why should I? It's not fair!'. The import of what Paul is saying here is: 'I'm in prison, folks, I'm suffering for Christ'. In chapter 4 verse 11, and we'll get to it at later stage, he says this: 'Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need'.

Now I'm not saying that Paul didn't ask in his heart at times: 'Why?'. I'm not saying he wasn't confused, but what Paul is saying is: 'I never complained verbally or intellectually in such a way that the world around saw me as a grumbler and a complainer!'. That's what he's getting at. Now, what are the reasons why Paul tells them not to murmur or complain? They're threefold, I want you to get this because it is so important for our assembly and for our individual lives, and for our evangelistic witness. The first reason is for our church. We ought not to grumble and complain for the sake of our church, verse 15: 'That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke'. Paul says you shouldn't murmur or complain in order that you become the children of God as He wants you to be, the type of child that He wants you to be. He uses this 'blameless and harmless', or 'harmless' could be translated 'innocent'.

The tragedy is that we are children at times, but in the wrong sense, in the way that we bicker over nonsense. We pout our mouths and we sulk over, at times, imaginary slights and hurts from our brethren and sisters in Christ. Paul says an essential part of this, to be a child of God, to be a member of the church of Jesus Christ, is to quit complaining, to be blameless. That simply means, the root meaning, 'without defect or blemish' - a moral and a spiritual purity, that no-one can point the finger at you and say: 'I know what he did, I saw him doing this that or the other thing'. You're not to blame others like that, but equally they're not to find any fault in you in order to blame you and in order to incite a complaining and a murmuring spirit. The word 'innocent' means 'blameless' as I said, or 'unmixed', or 'unadulterated'. It's actually used of unalloyed metal, metals that aren't mixed; it's used of wine that isn't mixed with water. What Paul is saying here is: 'You're not to be mixed with the world, the sentiments of the world, the philosophies and attitudes of the world. You're to be different, and you're to be seen to be different for the sake of the witness of the gospel of Christ'.

The Lord uses this term 'blameless and harmless' when He said: 'You're to be as wise as serpents, and as harmless as doves'. People aren't meant to be able to point the finger at you with regards to business or how you're a neighbour, or your attitudes, or your speech, or even how you complain about other Christians - it should not be so. Paul says you should be children of God without rebuke, without reproach. That word is closely related to 'blameless', but it's used over and over again in the Greek translation of the Old Testament of the lamb that is without blemish and without spot. You're to be seen and witnessed by the world around as being pure, untouched, uncontaminated of any blame or guilt. That's something else, isn't it?

You might be sitting here like I was studying this, and thinking: 'Well, how is this possible?'. Well, it's not possible on our own - it is possible to work out our salvation like this for the sake of the assembly, but we can't do it alone. We must be working out what God has put in us by the Holy Spirit. We must realise that it is in total and absolute dependence upon His power, His enablement and His grace, that we can do these things. As Jude said: 'He alone is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless', blameless is the word, 'before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy'. You will have noted in these past weeks that one of the chief joys

that the apostle found in Philippi would be their unity in Christ, their putting one another before each other, their bending over backwards to serve one another. Paul says you can't do that and complain and grumble within the church.

It goes on further, because Paul says: 'The reason why I have commanded this of you is also for your world, the world in which you live...that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world'. You see there is a tremendous negative impact upon the unsaved, those without Christ in the world around us, when we bicker and fight and grumble among ourselves. I hope commonsense would tell you that, but Paul is proving it by saying that you live in a crooked world, the word is 'bent, curved, twisted', the Greek is 'scolios' which is the word we get the medical term 'scoliosis' which involves a curvature of the spine, misalignment of the back. Paul is saying: 'You're living in this bent, warped, twisted world, and therefore in that world you've got to be seen to be straight'. 'Crooked and perverse', it's a similar word but it's more active, it's dynamic, it means that they try to do all around us in this world in a crooked, diluted and sinful, iniquitous way - but you're to be different in your dealings, and especially in your verbal conversation, your light is to be without murmuring and disputing.

Living pure, united, peaceful lives, Paul says, is a pre-requisite for taking the gospel to such a crooked and perverse world. We are to be in the midst of them, let's not miss that point, we are to be in the middle of the world, geographically, but spiritually we ought to be utterly and totally separate from them! Now the big question here is: are we silent lights to the world around us? Or does the way we behave, how perhaps we shelter ourselves and segregate ourselves from the world, and try to get as far away from them as possible; or the fact that they witness us bickering and fighting and complaining over nonsense, does that affect our witness? Paul says we are to preach 'holding forth the word of life', but what he's saying is that the backdrop of 'holding forth the word of life' is to be the shining blinding light of the lives that we live!

'Among whom', he says, look at, 'ye shine as lights'. It's reminiscent of what we learnt in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:14 and 16, where we've to live as the light of the world, as a light set on a high hill, as salt in the earth, that men may see our good works - not our murmuring and our grumbling and our complaining - and when they see our light, glorify our Father which is in heaven as we reflect the light of the world around us. The picture that Paul has here is a dark, black backdrop of space, and the stars shining forth. It is the lighthouse directing the storm tossed mariner into the safe harbour. In fact, the Greek word is 'as luminaries', the insinuation is that he's talking about the sun and the moon, the greatest lights of all! We're to be like that! That guide the whole world, the weather, the seas, and the sailors! As the world receives light from the sun and from the moon, so we are to hold the word of life forth, and the life is to be almost coming through us to that word and into their hearts - we're to be silent but effective in it!

The whole point is: our lives are to be the platform for the gospel, because the way that God has worked right throughout all of time is: 'The Word becomes flesh and dwells among men'. The word is to become flesh in our lives, we're to be like live wires literally, that when they come into contact with dead ones, by the process of induction we transfer the very power of our lives. It's like telegraph messages that we are to communicate by this divine power the light that shines out of our lives that we are Christ's, and it's meant to ignite and affect other people!

The question we need to ask ourselves is: what do we communicate? We can influence others by currents of good or currents of bad, but what do other people get when they rub up and down against us? Do they get complaints, moanings and grumbings? What they need to get is the light of the gospel, not just verbally - they hear you say: 'You know you need to be saved', and then in the next breath you're writing off some other believer - do you think they're stupid? I was talking with someone this week about how it's not enough to give out a tract, it's not enough to preach the gospel from the pulpit, we must be among the lost for a long enough time that we start to affect them by our light and to give them a chance to let our light shine upon them, if we have any light at all!

It is the word of life, the gospel, that brings life - don't misunderstand me. It is the power in the gospel, but what Paul is saying is: your lives are to be an illustration of that gospel to show that it works. Your life ought to lay weight to the words of the gospel. The unbeliever is an unlit lamp! Now I believe that perhaps the allusion that Paul is giving here is to the Philippian jailor, from Philippi of course, in Acts 16. You remember what happened when the earthquake came to free Paul and Silas, he was plunged into darkness, and he asked for a light - and Paul and Silas were his lights! They were his lights! Why? Because that man that heard them singing and praying and giving praise unto God in the prison cell, and it wasn't just when he said 'What must I do to be saved?' - Acts 16:31 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ' - that did the trick, but this man knew that the lips that were speaking the word of God were in front of a life that showed the power of God and the light of the Gospel!

We are to be both communicators and illuminators, we are to be both voices and lights, we are to speak but we're also to shine, we're to be heard but we're also to be felt! Silent lights for our church, for our world, and finally for our leaders. Paul says: 'That I may rejoice', verse 16, 'in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain'. Wuest translates it like this: 'That I have not run my race for a phantom prize, nor toiled for an elusive way'. Now don't think that Paul was going back on what he said in 1 Corinthians 15:58, that: no labour for the Lord is in vain - that was a different sense, I believe, than what Paul is saying here. He's insinuating that there is a sense in which it is possible to labour on God's children in vain with regards to the judgement seat. It's like competing for a prize that doesn't exist, running a marathon and finding that you were running for nothing; like working for wages that are never paid, there's nothing at the end of your day's work. Paul is saying: 'I want you people, my people, to be a source of joy to me at the judgement seat, that when I stand before God I will rejoice when He brings your name up'.

Isn't that what he said of the Thessalonians in chapter 2 and verse 19? 'For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy'. He wanted to be able to joy in the Philippian believers! You know the best thing a believer can do for their leaders and overseers in Christ, apart from praying for them, is to stop moaning, stop complaining, and be united so that we can say on that day: 'I did not run in vain, or toil in vain'. In other words, to be able to see that the work we're putting into the children of God, that it's profitable.

Now don't misunderstand me, but let's be honest: there are times when you're in the Lord's work and you feel that you're wasting your time. That might be wrong, but that's the facts! Sometimes the Lord's servants feel like that, and Paul didn't want to feel like that now or at the judgement seat! That he had poured all his efforts from prison into the Philippian Christians, and they were wasted for all they did was moan and complain. On the ceiling of the great state hall in Versailles there's a painting of Hercules in mythological surroundings, and it says that the artist took two and half years to complete the magnificent work. When he got to the end of it he was given no pay, and he was so utterly devastated that he committed suicide in that very room beneath that great painting, because he felt that life seemed without purpose to him if there was an absence of commensurate reward for the work that has been done - pointless!

Now there is a sense in which God's work is God's wages, but there is another sense that in the light of the fact that God has promised reward, who wants to be wasting their time? I don't! Sometimes leaders hear the attitude: 'It's none of your business, you mind your own business what I do with regards to the nights I'm not at the meetings, why I'm not at the Lord's Table'. Can I say to you: it is my business! It will be my business at the judgement seat, and I don't want to have wasted my time on any of you! The greatest joy a leader can have is what John said in 3 John 4: 'I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth'. God save us from living small inconsequential lives, for He would have us shine - and if He would have us shine, we must burn, and no lamp ever burns and gives light without burning up and consuming oil. There's no candle gives light without melting wax, and John the Baptist was described as a burning and a shining light - he shone and he lost his head for it! It cost him to burn!

Will we stop murmuring and complaining? Will we start shining and burning for God? For then our church will be blessed, the world will be blessed, and your leaders will be blessed when they stand at the judgement seat of Christ.

Our Father, help us to see them waiting, looking at us, silently watching all that we do. Oh Father, love is what Jesus came to unfold, and we pray that that condescending humility and love of Christ may shine forth in our lives as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, as You work in us - that this world that is crooked and perverse around us may see the light of the Gospel in our lives, and may be drawn to that light in salvation. Lord, help us in this assembly to be those who are marked by the fact that we love one another, that what this world will hear from us is not a mixed message of complaining and preaching of the Gospel, but Lord that they will see the love that we have for each other and for them and the message of love, and that they will come to Christ through the word of life. In His name we pray. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 15

"Paul's Christ-Like Friends"

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Philippians 2:17-30

Now do turn with me to Philippians chapter 2, and let me say that it would be great if some of you took notes these Lord's Day mornings - now I know it's not possible for everybody to do that, I know it's hard to take your eyes off me at times! But it would be great, because I know that I can't contain everything that I tell you, and I've been studying it all week, and I don't expect you to be able to contain it either. It would be good for you to take certain things down, and maybe go home and meditate upon them, or even get the tape to borrow afterwards and look over these messages again, because there is so much important truth that we can very easily miss.

What I want to bring to you this morning is 'Paul's Christ-like Friends'. This chapter is tremendous to us, because at times we really get taken away by the condescension of our Lord, and the great Christological aspect of how the Lord Jesus came from heaven and left His glory aside, and came to this earth in the form of a servant, and took upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh. But we often miss how Paul applied this great truth, and he's done it so far for us and he's doing it again by giving us two examples of two of his friends who he considers as Christ-like. I want you to just look at verses 18 and 19: "For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me. But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state". Then verse 25: "Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants".

It was John Dunne (sp?), the poet, that said: 'No man is an island', and even Paul the apostle himself, we might see him as a very independent character within the New Testament, he was not so independent that he didn't need or cherish very close friends. As you casually read through specifically Paul's epistles you find figures in it like Priscilla and Aquila, Silas and Barnabas, Tychicus and Trophimus, Onesiphorus and Epaphroditus, Timothy, Titus, Luke, and we could even say Mark, who stand out as familiar friends of the great apostle. They weren't just acquaintances or fellow workers with him, but he often describes them in very intimate and affectionate terms. The glimpses we often get of them show us that personally to Paul they were invaluable, and they were of great value to his ministry in the Gospel and his missionary journeys.

But what I want you to see specifically this morning is that where we find these two people mentioned, Timothy and Epaphroditus, it's in this passage that has been describing the condescension and humility of the Lord Jesus Christ that ought to be found within His followers. Verse 5: 'Let this mind', or this attitude, or this disposition, 'be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus'. What Paul is doing for us is, he's saying: 'This attitude, this disposition of humility and Christlikeness, can be seen and personified in my two friends Timothy and Epaphroditus. They are ordinary believers like you in Philippi, they're just ordinary 5'8" people; like James said, like Elijah who was a man of like passions as we are; they are not some sub-human, super-spiritual creations of God - half-angel, half-man - but they're ordinary men like you. They actually personify and encapsulate everything that I've been trying to teach you concerning the humility of the Lord Jesus that ought to be in you as believers'. I think that's tremendous, isn't it?

As Thomas Brooks, the 17th-century puritan, said: 'Example is the most powerful rhetoric'. It would be alright if Paul stopped at verse 16 or so, and talked about these lights that we ought to be in humanity lighting a dark world, talking about how the Lord Jesus Christ came from glory, left so much aside in His humility, and commanded us to be humble, but he gave us no examples that really appeal to us. But example is the most

powerful rhetoric in the sense that Paul doesn't just stop at this teaching, but he gives examples of people who are just like us, who are able to live this kind of life. I think perhaps the single most important aspect of Christian leadership is to have a godly life for others to emulate. It's alright being able to stand up and pontificate and preach if there's not a godly life - and I believe that that's where power is lacking often in many ministries, and sadly I have to look introspectively at myself and conclude the same.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon heard George Mueller preaching on one occasion, and he said that he had never heard a more simple message than that which George Mueller preached. He said it could be delivered to the boys and girls as a children's lesson, there was nothing profound or extraordinary in it except for one thing: George Mueller was in it - his life was the backdrop to his message. People knew that what he said was true because they could see it in his own life being personified and lived, and the weight of what he said was the fact that what he said was backed up by the life that he lived.

Some might say reading this passage: 'Well, it's alright talking about the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ, or even the apostle Paul; but the Lord Jesus was sinless, wasn't He? I'm not sinless. The apostle Paul was chosen of God, one of the twelve, he was the apostle to the Gentiles, he was a very special man given unique powers at times - but I'm not like Paul, I'm not an apostle, I haven't been given the abilities that Paul has been given'. Friends, Paul gives two examples of ordinary men who are able to live this life of humility. Guy King, the commentator, said: 'They're a couple of fine specimens for us'. So I want us to look at them, these men who are Christ's-ones - not only by name, but by nature. The label they wore corresponds to the substance that was found in the bottle - they are the real thing, through and through.

Now the reason we know this is because Paul cites three things that show their deep humility and sacrificial life for Christ. Here they are: one, they were ready to go anywhere. Both Timothy and Epaphroditus were ready to go anywhere. Two: they were ready to help anyone; and three: they were ready to sacrifice anything. Now put yourself in the position for just a moment this morning, imagine if God planned to send you to some dark pagan corner of the globe, to some unreached tribe and people who'd never heard the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but He was sending you to be a light in their pagan darkness and heathenism - would you go? Imagine if God called you to Siberia, not to the Caribbean, but to Siberia? Or if God called you, better, to Iraq - would you go? Well, God was calling these men, and they went. Like Henry Martyn, on the eve of his departure for the dark mission field, they said: 'I go to burn out for God, I am prepared to go anywhere, I'm ready to help anyone, and I'm prepared to sacrifice anything'. I wonder would we be prepared to do that if it was God's will for us? Any time, anywhere, anything for God.

Now if you go right throughout the whole of the Old and New Testament, you will find that those three rich characteristics are found in all of God's greatest servants. Remember when God came to Moses, and said: 'Moses, Moses', from that burning bush - and of course Moses went through a lot of argumentation and excuse-making with God, but at the end of it all the word of God declares: 'And Moses went' - Moses went! Where did he go? Moses went back to Egypt, the place that he had come from 40 years previously, in fact the place that he had ran from for his life - but he was prepared to go anywhere at any time for God, no matter what it cost. As we read of Elijah, it says of him: 'And Elijah went', where does it say Elijah went? He went to cruel Ahab to meet him, the King of Israel, who had been seeking out Elijah because his preaching was getting on his nerves, and it was causing problems among the court and the nation - yet when God told Elijah to go to the tyrant that was seeking his blood, Elijah went!

Go into the New Testament, we read: 'And Ananias went', where did Ananias go? Paul had been converted on the road to Damascus, Acts chapter 9, he goes into a little home - he's blinded because of the light he saw, and he's praying. Ananias is given a direction, a revelation from God to go and to heal Paul the apostle and give him his sight back. And Ananias begins to argue with God, it's as if he's saying - if I could paraphrase it, maybe I'm stepping over the line here, but this is the way I feel he's saying it: 'Lord, do You not know who this man is?

He's been persecuting the church. If I go to Paul, it's like putting my head in the mouth of the lion'. But after all his disputing and argument with God, it says: 'And Ananias went'.

Some of you will be familiar with the writings of F. B. Meyer, well F. B. Meyer preached right into his eighties. When he was at the age of 82 he said in one of his sermons: 'I have only one ambition, to be God's errand-boy'. One ambition, to be God's errand-boy - to go anywhere at any time with any cost! Do you remember when Gabriel came to Zacharias in the Nativity story in Luke chapter 1 verse 19, what he said of himself? He was sent from God: 'I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent...' - and that is the Master's plan and purpose not only for angels, but that was His plan and project for His disciples. In Mark 3:14 it says: 'And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them to preach the Gospel'. The angels are at the disposal of the Lord, the disciples were meant to be at disposal of Jesus Christ, and the question we are asking ourselves today as we look at the life of Timothy and Epaphroditus: are we at God's disposal to go anywhere at any time, and to sacrifice anything and to help anyone?

Well Paul, of course, is an example in himself - in verses 17 and 18 he says: 'Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you'. Another translation puts it like this: 'I have been offered as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith'. It was as if Paul had poured out his life upon the Philippians as a libation, a sacrificial costly offering. He was willing to be a constant sacrifice to God for the cause and aims of Christ. Do you know what that's telling us right away? It's telling us that sacrifice and not self-indulgence is the basis for all achievement. You can go to secular companies and businesses today and you'll find on some of their desks and on their walls as mottos: 'No gain without pain'; yet for some reason when we move from the secular into the spiritual realm we think that everything comes to us by grace, therefore - wrong conclusion - we don't need to do anything, endure anything, or experience pain to achieve anything! What a fatal mistake that is, because this is especially true in the spiritual realm: that sacrifice, not self-indulgence, but sacrifice is the basis of all achievement. I'm not talking about things that happen accidentally in your life, when something overtakes you that you've had no control over, and you think: 'Well, I did that, and I endured and experienced that for Christ' - this is not what Paul is talking about. He says: 'I have poured', he is active, he is voluntary in it, 'I have decided, and with my volition I have poured out my life as a choice and as a purpose upon you'.

I think this is often where we fall. This is not something accidental, but this is a choice that we make in the decisions of our life. I wonder who of us, given the choice, would choose to suffer; would choose ill-health over good health; would choose pain over peace; would choose legitimate anxiety over tranquillity - well, this was the experience of Paul, and we see it in 1 Corinthians 9 where he says: 'I buffet my body and bring it into subjection'. He chose through his disciplines, through his habits and everyday purposes, to pour out his life for God and for Christ. Now what's interesting in verses 3 and 4, if we think of what we have been learning in recent weeks, is that Paul is actively doing what he has told the Philippians to do when he compliments Timothy and Epaphroditus. Verse 3: 'Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves'. This is what he's doing with Timothy and Epaphroditus, he's talking about them, he's setting them up as an example not himself. 'Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others' - and he's now talking about what they did, what they achieved.

Let's look at these two characters for a moment: Timothy - I've called Timothy the sincere and selfless helper. If you're familiar with the New Testament you know that Timothy was a very close friend of the apostle Paul, in fact Paul says that it was akin to the relationship between a father and a son. In fact he greeted him on many occasions: 'To Timothy, my true son in the faith'. You see Timothy was converted through the apostle Paul, and not long after his conversion he became a companion with Paul on his missionary journeys and his personal helper. Paul would know Timothy's help right to the very end, therefore Paul could say: 'I have no man likeminded who will naturally care for your state'. Timothy, you see, was a man who was ready to go anywhere, to help anyone, and sacrifice anything to obey the word of God.

There's two things I want you to note from this passage about Timothy: one, he was a helper. I don't know whether you've experienced this, but it's not easy to take second place. Spurgeon said: 'It takes more grace than I can tell to play the second fiddle well'. It is true, and I think it takes as much grace if not more to be a helper than to be a leader. We would consider also that some people help other people for what they can get out of it, that's often the motivation - and they're only helping in a lower esteemed job or occupation because they're looking to greater things, they're wanting to climb the ladder and to aspire to a higher position. But it's an entirely different thing to take second place, and to devote your life as a servant to another man's aspirations, another man's goals and plans and purposes, and resign and refute any of your own.

Of course this goes totally against the grain to everything that we are taught in our society today and even in schools. 'Look after number one, aspire for the best for ourselves' - in fact the philosophy of the age is no different to what it was in Paul's age, where he said: 'All seek their own'. Timothy is different: 'He didn't look after just number one, but he poured his life out also like an offering; and he was ready to go anywhere when I commanded him according to the word of God, to help anyone, and to sacrifice anything - and I know this because he did it for me, and he didn't do it to aspire for a position or to get something out of it, he just did it for God!'. That's tremendous, isn't it? When we consider the Sermon on the Mount that we looked at in great depth not so long ago, the hypocrites that are found in the Pharisees were hypocrites because they did what they did - praying, fasting, giving alms, and so on - to be seen of men, to get the praise of men. You see, you can even do good things with the motivation to be seen of men - but the Lord Jesus said that that is not the spirit of the New Testament, but rather the Lord said in Matthew 25: 'He that is greatest among you is the one who serves'. That is the spirit of the New Testament. Timothy was the epitome of that spirit: he was a helper to Paul, not for what he could get out of Paul, not for the status that he could get by associating with Paul, but just for help's sake, for love's sake, for Christ's sake he did it.

Guy King in his commentary tells of a story where a man called Sir Bartel Freery (sp?) returned from India. When he returned a train was sent to the village station to bring him to his home, and when the footman wanted to know who this Sir Bartel Freery was - he was new to the job - he asked his mother, 'How will I recognise your son?'. His old mother said: 'Look out for somebody helping someone else'. Sure enough, the footman, when the train arrived from London, the footman observed a gentleman assisting an old lady to the platform, and then jumping in and out of the carriage to fetch her luggage. Going straight up to the man, the footman said: 'Mr Freery?'. He said: 'Yes'. Isn't that a lovely reputation to have? Look out for someone who's helping somebody else - you see, that's what Timothy did, because that's the spirit of the New Testament, in fact that's the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you remember when He was on the cross dying for your sins and mine, that those who mocked Him and blasphemed Him came by Him and said: 'He saved others' - what a reputation! But they went further: 'He saved others, Himself He cannot save' - but they got the emphasis wrong: 'He saved others, Himself He would not save'!

Timothy was a helper, but look secondly: Timothy was unselfish as a helper. Verse 21 says: 'For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's'. Even back then in Paul's day the ministry was used to further selfish ends. The sincere shepherd that we find in the word of God is the one who works for the flock because he loves the flock, and he desires the good of the flock. We see in Timothy something like this, it was more than simply loyalty to the apostle Paul through a human friendship, it was more than loyalty and esteem for a political or religious leader, it wasn't even just zeal for a cause, but it was love for the souls whom he was working among. Paul said: 'He takes a genuine interest', verse 20, 'in your welfare, he naturally cares for your state'. He's not shoving it on, it's a fruit of the Spirit to love and to care for other people.

You see, what Paul is saying here is that Timothy is an unselfish servant because the spirit of Christ is in him. What you see here in Timothy is the heart of the Master in His own minister. He is pitying the flock, he sympathises with the flock, he enters into their very needs and conditions that they're going through because

he's caring for them as Christ would care for them. A true servant of Christ is one who helps and helps unselfishly. Turn with me quickly to 2 Corinthians chapter 12, this can be seen in the apostle Paul, verse 14: 'Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not your's but you', now that's not so good a translation in a sense. What it really says is this: 'What I want is not your possessions, but you. I'm not coming to be a sponge and to drain the people of God', as so many servants of God seem to want to do even in this day as they did in Paul's day, 'I'm coming not to get possessions from you, but I'm coming because I want you, I love you'. That is the mark of a true helper, a true shepherd, and the opposite of that is what the Lord Jesus called a 'hireling', a man who's only filling the position of a shepherd to get out of that what he can - a wage.

So we see in Timothy that, while others in Paul's day were serving their own interests - their ease, their comfort, they were trying to establish a reputation as a preacher or some kind of Pastor - Timothy was concerned with the things of Jesus Christ. Some scholars, I'm not sure about how ill Timothy was, but some scholars believe that he was delicately made up - he was of a weak constitution. I think some make him a bit weaker than he really was, but nevertheless whatever his handicaps were he was the most dependable man that the apostle Paul could have! Now I'll tell you, I wouldn't like to have been keeping up with the apostle Paul! But Timothy, with whatever his ailments were and problems, he was dependable. Really what I'm asking ourselves and myself this morning is this: how many things do we give up for the Lord Jesus Christ? Do we give up any of our comforts for Christ? Do we ever run to defend our own reputation? Do we ever look after our own interests? As a result we lose the larger things of Jesus Christ, and we start seeking our own things rather than His things.

Timothy, the sincere selfless helper. Let's look quickly at Epaphroditus, I've called him the sacrificial friend. The story of Epaphroditus is unique. He was probably a church leader in Philippi, and the church sent him to Rome to minister to Paul in prison. When Epaphroditus heard of the awful sufferings of the apostle Paul he made more strenuous exertions to find him and to minister to his needs. Some would say he went too far, and through violent over exertion he became dangerously ill. He was so unselfish, Paul tells us here in this passage, that he took special pains to conceal his sickness from his friends in Philippi lest they should become anxious about him as well as worrying about the apostle Paul in prison. When he found out that they had found out about his illness, verse 26 says he became distressed. Yet we read that God miraculously and graciously healed him and restored him to health and strength, and spared the grief, the pain to pain, the sorrow to sorrow that the apostle would have felt at the death of this servant of his.

Now, what can we learn from Epaphroditus? Three things: he served - like Timothy, verse 25: 'Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered', served, 'my wants'. Now I'm sure that this man, probably an elder within the church at Philippi, was undoubtedly able to preach, to teach, to do great things - but he was prepared to take a gift to Paul, to minister to his bodily needs, and to take the epistle to the Philippians back to the church. He was prepared, it was not below him to meet someone's physical needs. The question that comes to us from that is: are we ministering to Christ's suffering ones? In the words of the Lord: are we seeking out the poor, His sick, His prisoners, ministering to them, giving them a cup of water and therefore doing it unto Him? Here is Epaphroditus, and that's what he did.

Secondly I want you to see that he sacrificed. Paul says he risked his life: he toiled, he troubled until he exhausted himself to such an extent that he became seriously ill. He went beyond his physical strength. Perhaps as he was lingering in the barracks on the cold damp floor he got some kind of disease - but verse 30 says that, no matter what it was, that he almost died. He came nigh unto death. It also says he was willing, 'not regarding his life', he was willing to risk his life! The Greek term there that is used for 'risked' could be translated 'gamble' - you could translate that statement: 'He gambled with his life to go and help the apostle Paul'. The word for 'gamble, risk', was a game that they used to play in Greece, it was called 'throwing the stake' - it was a bit like some of you men when you were a wee boy, you used to put your hand on the desk in school and get a penknife

and drop it from a height...maybe you didn't do that...maybe it's something psychological there about me...but you used to drop this penknife down - a bit like Russian Roulette if you like. They played it with stakes, wooden stakes - and Paul's using this word, that this is what Epaphroditus did with his life. 'He loved me so much, he loved Christ so much, that he was willing to go anywhere, to help anyone, and to pay any cost!' - even if it meant his life.

His only desire was that those in Philippi would not know how ill he was, isn't that tremendous? The selflessness! What Paul is saying here is an echo of the Lord Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount: to be seen of men in service is wrong, but to be seen of men in suffering is wrong as well! You say, 'Well, I can't help it if I've a broken leg' - that's not what I'm talking about. But in the way that you maybe pray to be praised of men, you ought not to suffer to be pitied of men, that's what he's saying. For if you do that - seek pity or praise - Jesus says you have your reward, but if you do it unto Him and you forget it as soon as you do it, Jesus says your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you openly.

Who are the ones Jesus says will sit at the right hand of the King when He comes in glory of His Father? What does Matthew 25 say? Those who fed the hungry, those who clothed the naked, those who visited those in prison - not those who prided themselves in service, but those who had forgotten that! How do I know it's those who had forgotten it? Because in verse 37 of Matthew 25 these people are astounded at what the Lord says: 'When I was in prison you came to me, when I was naked you clothed me, when I was hungry you fed me' - and they retort: 'When were you naked, when were you hungry, when were you in prison' - they had forgotten it! They didn't do it for the praise of men, but they did it unto Him. They are being rewarded on that day when He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsel of the hearts, and then shall every man have praise of God.

What a picture! I wish I had more time to show you this man Timothy, the sincere selfless helper; and Epaphroditus, the sacrificial friend who served, sacrificed, and was silent and self-forgetful in his service and in his suffering. We have to round it up, but what we're saying is this: these are the finest qualities of Christian character. You see, you could be a good Christian, you could even be a righteous man or woman, and not have these. It's the difference between a piece of coal and a diamond, it's the difference between a daisy and a beautiful rose - and spiritually it's the difference between the soul saved as one escaping through the flames, and the glorified saint sweeping through the gates with an abundant inheritance - as Peter says - into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

You see, Paul is saying that all of us have been given opportunities by God every day of our lives of winning these victories, of gaining these great rewards, and he's saying don't miss the opportunity in the choices you make: choose to suffer for Christ, choose to suffer to go anywhere, choose to suffer to help others no matter what the cost may be! He's telling us to face every situation with the prize, the goal in mind, forging our future crowns out of our fiery trials; turning opposition, temptation and suffering into growth in grace for our Lord Jesus.

Let me say to you in the closing moments that recently I've been reading through the biography of Hudson Taylor, that great missionary to China who sacrificed so much to take the Gospel to those who were dying in paganism. I read in that biography that he had two objectives in his preparation for the mission field - now this is before he went to China. Those two objectives were: one, learning to endure hardships; two, living cheaply. So, as a student, he decided to sleep on the floor, not to sleep on a mattress but to sleep on the floor without a mattress to get him used to such conditions that he would have to face on the mission field. For breakfast he ate brown biscuits and herring which was cheaper than butter. He found a little marketplace where he could buy cheese at 4 to 6 pence per pound, and he thought it tasted better than some of that for 8 pence per pound. He pickled a penny red cabbage with three half-pence worth of vinegar, and he made a large jarful to live on. He said: 'Living cheaply, but imaginatively, is what has meant that I can give away 60% of my earnings to God.'

And I have discovered that the more I give, the happier I become'. He recorded in his journals 'unspeakable joy all the day long and every day was my happy experience. God, even my God, was a living, bright reality and all I had to do was joyful service'. But he still felt he needed to flex his muscles for more spiritual strength - I'm skipping a lot of time here, but when he eventually got to China do you know where he lived? He lived in one room above an incense shop that was entered to by a ladder through an open hole in the wall. Dr D. Laporte (sp?), a Christian doctor who practised amongst the community where Taylor worked, recalled meeting Hudson Taylor, and said this - and this has gripped my heart, listen: 'I have seen him come home at the close of the day foot-sore and weary, his face covered with blisters from the heat of the sun. He would throw himself down to rest in a state of exhaustion, and then he would get up again in a few hours to face the toil and hardship of another day. It was clear to me that he enjoyed the highest respect from the Chinese, and was doing a great deal of good among them. His influence was like that of a fragrant flower spreading the sweetness of true Christianity all about him'. Why? Because example is more powerful than rhetoric! Could there be any better motto for the Christian soldier and follower of Jesus Christ than these three words? Anywhere, anyone, anything!

Let us pray: Father, we thank You for the wonderful example of our Lord Jesus and how He stooped from the glory that we cannot conceive of in our minds in heaven, and He came to this earth to be the servant of men and of God. Our Father, we thank Thee that we also have these examples of men who are of like passions as we are, who followed that way of humility and sacrifice and service - but Lord, I know that I'm not giving enough, and Lord we all must be able to say that we could give more, we could do more, we could go farther to others and help them, pay more of a price. Lord, we pray that we will make that evaluation now rather than in eternity, when because we have followed a path of save-yourself Christianity we'll say on that day: 'When by His grace I shall look on His face, I wish I'd given Him more'. Help us, Lord, to give more for the One who gave all. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 16

"Secure Your Joy"

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by Pastor David Legge
Philippians 3:1-8

Now we're turning in our Bibles to Philippians chapter 3, beginning to read at verse 1. Our subject today is: 'Secure Your Joy'. "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ".

The question I want to ask you today is: are you happy as a Christian? I'm not trying to change your mind, but are you happy as a Christian? Or I could pose it this way: do you enjoy God? I hope I'm not being irreverent or sounding sacrilegious to say such things 'enjoying God', but it's a valid question, especially as we look at the theme of what Paul is talking about in this chapter 3 of Philippians. Are you happy as a Christian and do you enjoy God? Biographers of Martin Luther tell us that in the later years of his life he became a very gloomy man, so much so that one day his wife entered into the study where he was sitting reading a book, and she was absolutely dressed in black with a veil over her head. Martin said: 'Who's dead?'. She said: 'God is', and immediately the breath was taken from the old reformer, and he responded: 'My soul, why should you talk like that?'. 'Because of your gloom', she replied. It was as if God had died, and all the promises of God had died with Him.

The German philosopher, Frederick Nietzsche, said scornfully - he was an enemy of Christianity - about Christians of his day: 'I would believe in their salvation if they looked a little more like people who had been saved'. Now, we don't want to side with the enemies of Christianity, but I think he has a valid point: there are times when Christians betray the true joy that they ought to have in their salvation, with all the blessings that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. So much of the time we as Christians can be the same in our emotions as those who are not Christians. If we purely looked at the difference, the contrast between a Christian and a non-Christian, and the level of emotions, we may be startled to find that there is no difference whatsoever.

Now don't misunderstand me in what I'm going to say today, because we never ever want as Christians to major purely on the emotional level. But all of us here, I hope at least, all of us have emotions, and we have to learn as Christians how to deal with our emotions - whether we're going to control them, or whether they are going to control us. The Bible has a great deal to say about emotions, and one of those emotions we're looking at this morning: Paul talks about joy - 'Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord, be joyful in the Lord'.

Many are over-emotional, many major on the emotions to excess and to error, but then there's the other side, and there's the pendulum swing of many fundamentalist Christians who go to the other extreme of ignoring emotions completely and categorically - even despising, detesting anything that is emotional. What I want you to note right away here in verse 1 is that joy is commanded of the believer, it is a command of the apostle: 'My brethren, rejoice in the Lord'. But what I want you to see today is not only that it is a command that we have to

do, but it is the secret of happy Christian experience. If there's a secret to having joy in your life, or having a happy existence, it is to learn how to rejoice in the Lord.

Paul is saying that it is our entitlement to have a joyous life, therefore that's why he says: 'To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe'. It's not irksome to bring to them the subject of joy, because he believes they're missing out if they're not rejoicing in the Lord. It's something that is their right as a Christian. We're going to see in a later study, in chapter 4 and verse 4, that he repeats it again. He's already said it in this book, but here it is: 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice'. A paraphrase of what he says in verse 1 of chapter 3 could be like this: 'Find your chief joy in the Lord'.

Now I hope you would agree with me today when I say that out of all the people on the planet, Christians ought to be the most happy - would you agree with me? Because Paul says that we are in the Lord, and the circumference, the centre of our lives and the very existence of everything that goes on in our life is the Lord Jesus Christ. Our experience should be exactly the same as Old Testament Christians, only greater, but they knew how to rejoice in the Lord. You remember great King David, whenever his troops were going to rebel against him, it says that David encouraged himself in the Lord. He learned in life's darkest circumstances how to rejoice in the Lord. You remember how Nehemiah, troubled with the enemies of Israel, reminded God's own people that the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Now Paul the apostle, coming to us now in the New Testament age, is saying even louder, more repetitively, and greater because we are in Christ, and the fact that we have all blessings in Christ - he's coming again and saying that we out of all people ever in the Bible and in universal existence should be able to rejoice in the Lord. In fact, he's saying categorically that true joy can only be found in Christ. We're going to see this in the moments that remain, that true joy can't be found in ourselves - who we are or what we can do, it can only be found by focusing and resting upon the centrality of Christ in the life. Therefore, Paul says, we ought to focus on Him and count everything as loss.

In verse 1, when he says: 'My brethren, rejoice in the Lord', it would presuppose, I think, that the Philippians were in danger of trying to find their joy somewhere else. My question to you today is: where is your joy centred? Are you in danger, like the Philippians, of centring your joy and your life's satisfaction in something else other than the Lord Jesus Christ? Can I ask you today: is your joy in the Lord? I mean, really in the Lord? Is He the source of your life's joy if you have any at all? Think about it for a moment, because as I've been meditating on this, and been thinking about how we can enjoy a church atmosphere - what I mean is, the things that surround a church, the externalities of church life. Some of you enjoy singing, even though you can't sing some of you! But some of you enjoy singing and music, others enjoy just the company. Maybe you're lonely at home and you enjoy getting out - there's nothing wrong with that whatsoever. Some of you enjoy preaching, I don't know whose preaching - but you enjoy it anyway! You like to hear the word of God, you like to read the word of God, maybe at home you like to study the word of God. Some of us enjoy praying, we enjoy talking about prayer, and we enjoy exercising prayer and seeing prayer answered. Others enjoy going round the doors witnessing to people, even in their workplace giving out a tract for the Lord Jesus, giving their testimony. Some enjoy serving, others enjoy just even the ritual of sitting around the Breaking of Bread, and breaking the bread and drinking from the cup.

All of those things are right, and we should enjoy all of them, but what I want you to see today - and I think this is Paul's main point - is that we could be doing all these things, and not enjoying the Lord! I wonder have you ever considered the possibility of that? I wonder if all these things that we are and we do were taken from us, would we still have the joy that they bring to us? Or would our joy be something that's deeper, and rooted and grounded in the person, the reality of the Christ that is within us, the hope of glory? Is our joy in the circumstances and externalities of the situation, or is it something that changes not because the possessing Christ within us never changes - He's the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Well, here's the test, and answer it honestly, please, to yourself: how long has it been since you sat down, and you took a long good hard look at your life, and you started to re-evaluate the things which you're giving your time to, your talents to, you're pouring your energies into, perhaps even you're giving your material resources to, to see whether those things that occupy your attention are really the important things after all? Now I think if you do that you'll see what is the dynamite force, the dynamic force of your life, what is the motivation of your living. It would be good for all of us to do a spiritual check-up, an MOT like that, because it's so easy to become diverted from what God intends to be the primary focus of all of our lives, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

What did he say in chapter 1 and verse 21? 'For me to live is Christ' - I'm sure he enjoyed singing, I'm sure he enjoyed the meetings, I'm sure he enjoyed the exposition of God's word, I'm sure he enjoyed serving the Lord on his missionary journeys and leading people to Christ - but when it came to the bottom line, the common denominator of what was the dynamic force behind Paul the apostle's life: it was Christ and Christ alone! The Philippians were in danger of losing their centre joy. We see this when Paul says in verse 2: 'Beware of dogs' - now we don't have time to go through all these descriptions, but the apostle is speaking to them of the dangers and devious doctrinal defection that was coming to the church in Philippi. There were these false teachers called Judiasers who had got converted, they said, as Christians; and were trusting in the death and resurrection of Christ alone for the forgiveness of their sins - but they added to that the keeping of Moses' law, the rituals of circumcision, the regulations and the rites, and all the rest of the feasts and the fastings, in order to be accepted by God and sanctified into the image of God.

We can't go into all that, but what I do want you to see, as Paul gives this description of these Judiasers: their main fallacy was that they set aside Jesus Christ from His rightful place of pre-eminence, and they put themselves in that place - what they could do, what they could achieve - they made the believer the centre of their Christian life. The teachers, of course, I'm sure wouldn't have admitted that, but they were giving man the glory instead of giving all the glory to God in Christ. They were glorying in the flesh: what they could do, what they said, who they were - it was a system that gave glory to men, but for a man to take the glory in the flesh, Paul is saying, is to take the rightful place of Jesus Christ! Their joy and their satisfaction was in their own achievements, rather than in the Lord and the Lord alone! Do you see it?

That's why he says in verse 1, if I could put it like this: 'My brethren, find your rejoicing where you ought to find it, in the Lord and not in your own selves, and in that which you have obtained by the flesh - therefore beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision' - other expressions of contempt that he gives to these men who tried to replace the glory, the centrality, and the dependence of Christ with their own achievements in the flesh. So Paul goes into examples from his own personal past to show how he too made that mistake. He says: 'If anybody has a right to boast, I have'. Verse 4: 'I have confidence in the flesh in my past. I was circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless'. Seven marks of blameless, unblemished religious fleshly self-righteousness that Paul the apostle had in his own past life before conversion. But what Paul says is this, verse 7: 'The things which were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. What I gained in the flesh, under the law, I found at my conversion to be vastly inferior to what I found in Christ'.

Where is your joy centred? Could it be that our joy, at times, is centred on who we are, or what we do for ourselves or do for God? Or can we say with Paul: 'Even those things that are gain to me in the flesh, I can count them loss for Christ - my true joy comes from being rooted and grounded in Christ, not in myself and what I have attained in the flesh'? Now here's the question we need to address in our closing moments: how can your joy be secured? How can your joy be secured? The formula is found in verses 7 and 8: 'But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom', underline this, 'I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ'.

He contrasts the works of the flesh with dung. It's amazing, isn't it, when we think about it? The word 'dung' is rightly translated here, but it equally legitimately could be translated 'leftovers from a meal'. These fleshly works that I have in my life in the past, before conversion, it's like the housewife carrying back into the kitchen all the family leftovers - the things that they didn't want to eat. I could translate it like this: 'For years', Paul says, 'I fed on the scraps which Moses provided, I was satisfied with them and was proud of my attainments in Judaism, and then the time came when God put before me living bread from heaven and I tasted of it, I ate of it and was satisfied - and I don't want those table scraps any more!'.

Isn't that it? The seven boasts in verses 4 to 6 are his gains, but is he not standing upon the ground of the Lord Jesus when the Saviour told that parable of the pearl of great price? The Saviour said: 'Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking beautiful pearls'. Paul had boasted in his past life of seven beautiful pearls of his Jewish way of life, following the law; but Jesus' parable goes on to say: 'When he had found one pearl of great value, he went away and sold all that he had and bought it!'. What the apostle tells us here is that he gave up all his previous pearls, because he was smitten with the sense of the superiority of the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

I wonder are we satisfied with Christ alone? Are we? You know I love music, and I love certain types of music - some people get so up tight about music: 'We need this, we need that to liven our music up, to liven the atmosphere up'. There's nothing wrong with music, but do we need superfluous things, frills; do we need magic in the pulpit to make us satisfied, to titillate us and tantalise us, to excite us, to entertain us? It's simply because we aren't satisfied in Christ alone; and if all of these things were taken away from us, would we have deep unquenchable joy in the person of Jesus Christ? Are we satisfied in Christ alone? And do we consider anything and everything else, even good things, to be loss as long as we have Christ?

John Wesley's father said, after his house burnt down and his children were led to safety: 'Let the house go, neighbours, I have here all my children'. 'Let the house go', that's what Paul said: 'Judaism, let it go. Works of the flesh, let it go - even the good things that I can do for God', you know there's good flesh as well as bad flesh, 'even the things I think I'm good at, I give myself a pat on the back for, let them go that I can win Christ!'. Or are we like Micah, the false prophet: 'Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away; and what have I more?' - what have I more? What have you, believer? I say this advisedly: if your Bible's taken off you - that's what's happening to some believers across the world - what have you if the Iron Hall is taken off you? What have you if a certain interpretation of Scripture that you make a god out of is taken off you? Is it Christ, and is it Christ alone that is the source of your joy? These other things aren't wrong, some of them are good, but they should not be the seat of our affections!

Paul could say in verse 8: 'I count all things that were gain to me as loss now, because of the superior worth that I have found in knowing Christ Jesus my Lord' - everything doesn't matter any more! It was Florence Nightingale who said: 'I have never refused God anything' - what about that? Can you say that? That you've given all, and you've given all and you feel that there's no loss? It's not a sacrifice to give all when you're getting Christ back, for God is no man's debtor! When Florence Nightingale gave all to God, God gave everything to her - Christ! That's the thinking behind Paul's mind - we all look at Paul's life and say: 'What a poor soul he was! Look at what he had to pay for Christ, look at what he had to suffer!'. We look at the missionaries: 'Aren't they so poor? I hope God never calls me to do like of that!' - that's not the way they saw it! They were more than willing to gather all their possessions, all their achievements, all their gain in their arms and go over the cliff of God's graciousness and drop them off for Christ!

There is no comparison, you see. Even good things of position and pleasure, even things that the word of God says 'He hath given us richly to enjoy', if we're willing to give them up we receive Christ. Paul says he suffered the loss of all things: health, wealth, you name it, he suffered the loss of them all - why? To win Christ! Do you

know what happens when you start to talk like this? Some of the Lord Jesus' disciples wander over and say: 'What meaneth this waste? It's a waste, isn't it?'. When a reprobate prodigal is breaking an alabaster box of worship, pouring out her life at the feet of the Lord Jesus, a love gift - many people think it's a waste, but Paul didn't think that: it was gain, it was Christ. That's what people said when C.T. Studd, the great Cambridge and England cricketer who had inherited great wealth from one of his relatives, and then gave up his private fortune and went off to labour in the mission fields of inland China and unevangelised Africa - when he gave up this earthly waste, and he did waste it, but what did he waste it for? Heavenly gain!

They would have said the same, I believe - what meaneth this waste? - of the little corn of wheat, beautiful, lovely golden corn of wheat that fell into the ground and rotted and crumbled, and died and was trodden in under the farmer's foot. But Jesus said: 'If it die, it bringeth forth much fruit'. I know what's going on in your minds: 'This guy's record's stuck again: sacrifice, sacrifice, sacrifice, sacrifice' - no! Paul's point is that it's no sacrifice, for I get Christ! You see one of the biggest sources of pride that we can have in our life is: 'I gave this up for Jesus. I went here for Jesus. I did this for Jesus. I suffered that for Jesus'. Someone trying to encourage Hudson Taylor on one occasion said: 'Mr Taylor, you must have sacrificed much'. 'Man, I never made a sacrifice in my life', for he got Christ - do you see it? Having tasted Christ and having received Christ's righteousness, Paul can no longer glory in what he is, or what he does, or what he has become - to him, living is Christ, and his joy and his rejoicing are no longer in himself. I think if there's a secret to Christian happiness, contentment and joy, it is being willing to give up everything to gain Christ.

Well, believer, are you happy? Are you a joyful Christian? I'll tell you, it's so important that we're joyful Christians, for it's what God intended in the beginning - and our faces will show whether we're joyful or not. So many walk about with big long faces tripping themselves, and they think that that's holiness - and the world starts to believe that long faces mean holiness. Do you know what the Bible says? Psalm 34 verse 5, talking about saints looking to the face of God: 'They looked unto Him and were radiant!'. When you look into the face of God, you don't have a long face, you have a broad face! A friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson's said of him on one occasion that 'He came into our house this morning with a sunbeam in his face'.

Now I don't want, unnecessarily, to offend anybody here, but I'll do it anyway! We get the faces we deserve, did you know that? If you have a grumpy face, a gurney* face, a moaning face, you deserve it - for you get the face that your heart gives you. A hospital nurse on one occasion entered her patient's room, and he said of her: 'She came into the room with her affidavit face'. Do you know what an affidavit is? It's a legal term, something that testifies to the validity of a statement - he's just saying that what was testifying what was in her heart, the validity of it, was the mark that was on her face. As Christians our faces identify and validate our character and our heart! Whether we're living a life of joy, or whether our insides are wizened up with bitterness, and gall, and hatred, and guile. Someone has rightly said: 'The face is the map of the mind, it is the table of contents of the heart, it is the playground of the emotions, the battlefield of the passions, and the landscape of the soul'.

*sour

What does your face reveal about you? Does it reveal that you have joy? Does it express that your deep satisfaction and happiness is in Christ, and when you're ill you can express that joy, when things go against you you can express that joy, when people say all manner of evil against you falsely for His sake, you can have that joy! I have a great deal of esteem for George Mueller, that great man of faith, and it was he who said on one occasion - I think I've told you this before - that he made it his morning daily occupation to secure his happiness in God, to make sure before he went out of the closet that he was happy in God. He began a new year's address at Bethesda Chapel in 1876 by making this point, and I quote it to you as I close: 'We have, through the goodness of the Lord, been permitted to enter upon another year - and the minds of many among us will no doubt be occupied with plans for the future, and the various fears of our work and service for the Lord. If our lives are spared we shall be engaged in those: the welfare of our families, the prosperity of our business, our work and service for Christ may be considered the most important matters to be attended to; but according to

my judgement the most important point to be attended to is this: above all things see to it that your souls are happy in the Lord. Other things may press upon you, the Lord's work may even have urgent claims upon your attention, but I deliberately repeat it' - like Paul did - 'it is of supreme and paramount importance that you should seek above all things to have your souls truly happy in God Himself! Day by day seek to make this the most important business of your life. This has been my firm and settled condition for the last 5 and 30 years. For the first four years after my conversion I knew not it's vast importance, but now after much experience I specially commend this point to the notice of my younger brethren and sisters in Christ: the secret of all true effectual service is joy in God, having experimental acquaintance and fellowship with God Himself'.

Surely we know by now going through this epistle, that joy is kept or lost not by external conditions, but by the inner standard of our lives - it's the result of what is inside us rather than what's outside of us. You can't try and make happiness around you, you can't try and keep happiness when the conditions are conducive to it in your environment, it can't be kept any more than your health can be kept - but what you can do is keep the laws that will keep you happy deep down in your soul when all hell is breaking loose! 'What is that?', you say. Keep the Lord as the centre of your life, and you will have the joy of the Lord as your strength - for joy is not the absence of trouble, joy is the presence of Christ!

We sang this hymn in our Breaking of Bread service, and I wasn't intending singing it now, but we're going to sing it: 469 - and you know, our focus around the table was on the Lord and His cross, and of course that is the focus of this hymn. But it is found, as you'll see, in our hymnbook in the 'Consecration and Love to Christ' section, which tells us that we're looking at Christ's cross and asking ourselves: are we crucified with Christ? And as verse one says: 'My richest gain I count but loss, and pour content on all my pride'. When you look at the cross do you say: 'Forbid it Lord that I should boast, save in the cross of Christ my Lord. All the vain things that charmed me most' - that make me happy apart from Christ, can you say today, now, here, at this moment - 'I sacrifice them to win Christ'? I wonder what it is you're not willing to give up - what is it, good or bad, that you're not willing to lose, that you've got your hand gripped so tightly around that no-one can prize it out of your grip? Can I urge you, dear child of God, if you can find the strength and the grace in Christ to open your hand and to count that thing as loss, God will give you Christ for it! Are you able to say: 'I would give up everything except Christ, I don't want anything except Christ'?

Our Father, this saying is so hard, but it wouldn't be given to us if we had not the ability and strength given of God to obey - so help us, Lord, we pray, to count all things loss for Christ, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, to suffer loss of all things and to count them as dung that we may win Him. Let our joy not be in ourselves or in our circumstances, but in the One who changes not - Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today and forever. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 17

"Big Appetites"

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by Pastor David Legge
Philippians 3:7-11

We're turning to Philippians chapter 3, the epistle to the Philippians chapter 3, and we're beginning to read this morning at verse 7. You remember that last week Paul was telling us how we can rejoice, not in the things that we have achieved for the Lord, or probably for ourselves just for our own selfish fleshly appetite, but rather we ought to rejoice in the Lord and His grace toward us - so much so that he told us that those things which were gain to him in the matters of the law, even positive things, good things, righteous things, he counted them as nothing, as loss for Christ.

Verse 7: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead".

Now, in your daily reading of Scripture, which I hope is taken for granted, you will find spiritual giants right from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the New. Just a casual reading of church history will confront you with spiritual giants, men and women of God, certain people who as Christians, children of God, stand out from the rest as giants with God and with men. From time to time perhaps you're tempted to ask the question: 'Well, what makes a person a spiritual giant? What is the distinctive that makes that person different from the run-of-the-mill Christian? Are they born in that way or have they had certain privileges that have allowed them to develop or evolve into such spiritual high flyers?'. Now if we were to ask the apostle Paul, I think the answer that he would give us are these verses that we've read together this morning, indeed the first seven or so verses would tell us that Paul says that there is nothing in man by nature that gives him spirituality. There's nothing that sets a man 'in tick', if you like, with God, or gives him credit with God - that is, nothing in his own human nature that can commend him in any way to God. That is before grace as well as after grace, as has been shown to us.

Sometimes we relegate these things as prior to conversion, but what we're talking about today is not only the things before conversion, but even our achievements after conversion in no way bring us nearer to God, because we still walk by grace. Paul is saying that it's not the personality of the person that makes them a spiritual giant, and we could maybe fall into that mistake of thinking that some are more prone to being spiritual than others - that's what people in the world say, 'Some have a spiritual, an other-worldly disposition'. Then some, even I think in the church - I just gauge this from conversations that I hear - think that there are some people that are more prone to be spiritual than others, with that type of contemplative and deep personality. Paul says that is rubbish! There is no one predisposed through personality to being a spiritual giant.

Then others say: 'Well, it's got a lot, I think, to do with the circumstances of that particular person'. Maybe the circumstances of salvation are cited, in other words if you have some kind of sensational testimony of conversion, well that predisposes, almost thrusts you, toward spiritual maturity. There's this equation made that the heights that we attain are measured by the depths that we have been taken from. In other words, if you were down in the gutter as an awful sinner and you've been forgiven much, then you'll be much for God, and you have a greater chance of being a spiritual giant than an ordinary person, perhaps saved as a young child. Well,

Paul just levels the ground with all this kind of debate and conjecture, he says right away: 'To be a spiritual man or woman has got nothing to do with your personality, it's got nothing to do with your experience, it's got nothing to do with your circumstances - whether of conversion or after conversion - but it's all brought down to one word', and I think if Paul could use this word, this is the word he would use to us today, summing up the whole of these verses that we've read, it's all down to one thing: appetite. It's down to your spiritual appetite.

Now I want to talk to you this morning in the time that's left, if we can get through it all, about big appetites. Now I'm not going to level anybody out in particular, so don't worry about that, but you will know that when a child is a baby that you feed it on the milk, and then eventually it goes to solids, and eventually it grows to an adult. But really, if you were to sum up that development of digestion that makes the child grow, you would say that it's all down to appetite.

It is exactly the same parallel in the spiritual realm, let me give you an example from the Old Testament. If you were to flick back to Exodus 33 for a moment, just do that, Exodus 33 - we come right into the middle of the life of Moses, and I don't need to spend time telling you the great heights that Moses reached to as a spiritual man. But what we have in Moses' own records, these are Moses' own words in Exodus, we have him telling us - I think - that these spiritual heights that he got to, or if you like the fact that he was a spiritual giant, were not achieved by any of the knowledge that he acquired in the universities of Egypt, or any of the experiences that he had in Egypt, or even in the wilderness - nothing to do with those things. Now certainly those things honed him and helped him, but those things don't make you a spiritual giant.

Here, I think, is the key to it all in verse 10 of chapter 33: 'And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle. And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight'. Now watch this verse: 'Now therefore, I pray thee', Moses says, 'if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people'. In verse 18 again we see this appetite: 'And he said, I beseech thee, O LORD, show me thy glory'.

Now Moses had great knowledge, Moses went through tremendous experiences with God and that God had led him into, but I think he's characterised above all things as having a desire to go deeper with God, a desire to know God. Verse 13: 'That I may know Thee' - this wasn't just a desire in his mind, but it was a desire for a heart knowledge of God: that his human heartbeat would be in harmony with the heartbeat of God Almighty. Now you can turn over the pages of the Old Testament and find this right throughout every book, every great man of God, every prophet and patriarch and priest. Let me give you an example: if you look at the sweet Psalmist of Israel, David and you turn to Psalm 42, I think you would agree with me that despite all of his sins and faults and failings, David was a man of God and even a spiritual giant. Psalm 42 - but his achievement as a spiritual giant was not through the knowledge that he had, and he had great knowledge; not through the circumstances that he had in the court as King, but here is the crux if you like, the common feature of why David knew God as he did, verses 1 and 2: 'As the hart', or as the deer, 'panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?'.

Do you see it? An appetite for God! Psalm 63, quickly, just to show you that that's not an isolated incident - verse 1: 'O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary'. Verse 8: 'My soul followeth hard after thee' - now that word 'followeth hard' is the sense of hunting: 'My soul is hunting after thee, hunting the Lord down!'. Of course this is a sentiment right throughout the

Scriptures, for the Lord Jesus in His Beatitudes, what did He say? 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled'.

Now as we come to Philippians chapter 3, all these things could be said of Paul. Oh yes, he had a tremendous, spectacular conversion, a Damascus Road experience. He had tremendous circumstances in his previous life before conversion at the feet of Gamaliel, and we know from this chapter alone how great an expert he was in the law, and indeed obeying the law - but it wasn't his conversion, it wasn't his circumstances, it wasn't his knowledge of the word of God, but he's characterised here as having an insatiable appetite for Christ. I believe that's what made Paul, and indeed what made any man before Paul or after Paul a spiritual man or woman: an appetite for Jesus Christ.

You could paraphrase Paul's words in these verses: 'I give up everything in which I had found my standing in Israel; I give up all that I counted treasure and held dear because of the superior worth that there is in knowing Jesus Christ. My desire previously was to be found acceptable when tested by the Mosaic law, but now the consuming passion of my life is a person, to know Him intimately, experientially and continuously!'. What an appetite he had for the Lord Jesus! That's what we need, and I'm asking you today: do you have an appetite for the Saviour? Do you have an appetite for the things of God? I asked you last week: are you happy in God? Do you enjoy God? I'm asking you this week: do you desire God?

You know that the little bird, when it's a baby, begins to open its mouth - it's then fed by its parents, but it's not fed until it begins to open its mouth. You know, God isn't in the business of force-feeding His saints, of wrenching their mouths open and shoving spiritual truths down their throats, but God's way of working is to feed in response to appetite. I hear that years ago babies - I'm only getting into these things and learning myself! - babies used to be fed by 'schedule feeding'. I know there's a debate going on, but it tends to be the case that nowadays some adhere to what is called 'demand feeding' - in other words you don't feed the child every four hours, you feed the child when the child wants fed. That's the way God works: if you want fed, if you're hungering and thirsting after Him, He will feed you and He will clothe you. He will satisfy you!

Spiritual giants like Paul aren't born, and I know there's many things that we're elected and predestinated and all to do with Paul - but in a human sense Paul wasn't born that way, he was made that way because he had an insatiable appetite for the Lord. If you were to ask Paul: 'Paul, what made you a man of God?', he would say: 'When I found the superior worth there was in knowing Christ, He became the goal of my life, He became the passion of my days, to know Him became the impelling, compelling, propelling force in my life - so that life can be summed up in this: life is knowing Him'. I wonder can we get there?

Let's look quickly at his three goals, his three goals in life. One, verse 8: to win Christ, that I might win Christ. That is the Person of salvation. He knew that salvation wasn't in a church, or in a creed, or in a religion, or keeping a code of ethics, it was in a Person: the Person of salvation, the Saviour, and he wanted to win Him. The second desire, verse 9: to be found in Christ. This is the position of salvation. He wasn't standing now as a Jew in his own righteousness according to the law, but he's standing outside of that and in Christ - because you can't stand in your own righteousness at the one time, and be standing in Christ. If you're in Christ you're out of your own righteousness, and if you're out of Christ you're in your own righteousness and you will be condemned. He was found, and wanted to be found, in the position of Christ. Thirdly, verse 10: that I may know Him, to know Christ - and this is the power of salvation, and this is what I want to dwell on today.

A growing intimacy: to know Christ is to know the power of salvation. It was Daniel who said: 'The people who do know their God will do strong exploits'. Can you think of a New Testament saint that did greater exploits than the apostle? Why was it? Because of the appetite he had for God: to win Christ, to be found in Christ, to know Christ above all else! Listen to what F. B. Meyer says: 'We may know Him personally yet intimately face-to-face. Christ does not live back in the centuries, nor amid the clouds of heaven, He is near us, He is with us,

compassing our path, in our lying down, and acquainted with all our ways. But we cannot know Him in this mortal life except through the illumination and the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and we must surely know Christ not as a stranger who turns in to visit for the night or as the exalted King of men, there must be the inner knowledge as of those whom He counts His own familiar friends, whom He trusts with His secrets, who eat with Him His own bread'.

Ah, Paul is talking here about knowing Him in salvation, He's talking about something deeper - an intimate knowledge of Christ through a communion with Him. Paul tells us what that communion involves. If you want to know Christ like this, there are three things that you've got to be prepared for. Everybody loves the first, there's a real appetite for this one, verse 10: 'To know Him, and the power of His resurrection', another paraphrase: 'I want to know Him in a personal, intimate way; I want the resurrection power that is available to me from Him, to be operating daily in my life; I want the power that brought Him to resurrection to be working in me'. That's what he saying.

Now if you note the order of these three things: the power of His resurrection; the fellowship of His sufferings; being made conformable unto His death - you'll see that it's the opposite of the order that's given through Christ's death at salvation. You see this, look down at it, the order of salvation in Christ's redemption is: He suffered, He died, He was resurrected - but the order of Christian life and experience is the opposite: it is resurrection, being brought to life, given power to live; then it is suffering; and then it is death. The only conceivable explanation for that is simply this: that you can't come and offer yourself on the altar of God, first of all unless you're saved, but this is the point I think Paul is getting across: you need even the power of God's resurrection to sacrifice your life like this. You can't just do it of yourself. It can't be some kind of cold, calculated, dead, religious, ritualistic surrender. But if it's going to be true and it's going to be complete and absolute, it's got to be of the Spirit of God, and it's got to be made in the power of the resurrection.

Let me illustrate this by citing Abraham for a moment. Do you ever think what it was, what power was behind Abraham that let him sacrifice, or be willing to sacrifice his son? How he was able to set his son on the altar of Moriah? The one in whom was all the hopes of His patriarchship, and hopes of the nation, and all his emotional family affections were bound up in this lad; all the promises of God's covenant to His people were inseparably connected with this boy - so what was it that drove Abraham to set this young lad on the altar, to lift the knife above him, and be just about ready to plunge it? I'll tell you what it was: it was the power of Christ's resurrection. Do we not read in Hebrews chapter 11 verse 19 that accounting by faith Abraham did this, reckoning that God was able to raise Isaac up even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure? We see it, in fact, in the narrative of Genesis 22, how he told his servants that he and the lad would return!

Do you see what I'm saying here? Do you see the picture that's being built by the Holy Spirit, that if you're to make spiritual sacrifices for the Lord Jesus Christ they will only be achieved in the power of the resurrection, by faith, knowing that there are greater things on ahead! It was that blessed hope and that triumphant faith that took the sting from his sorrow, and gave life and victory to the sacrifice that he was willing to make. It is faith, the New Testament tells us, that works by love, that overcomes the world and even the very grave itself. Now Paul wanted that power to be working in his life - do you not want it? I want it!

Turn quickly to Ephesians chapter 1, and I can't spend too much time here, but it's important. Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians that they might experientially know that same power. He reminded them of what that same power did for Jesus Christ, verse 19: 'That ye may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead', that power burst Him from the grave, 'and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places', that power set Him at the right hand of the Father in glory. Thirdly: 'Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that

which is to come', that power subjected everything under the seed of the Lord Jesus Christ, gave Him the universal authority over everything that exists, and constituted Jesus Christ as the head of the church. Verse 22: 'And He hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church' - and Paul says: 'I want to know that power!'.

I believe he knew it. Why did he know it? Because he was the apostle Paul? No. Because he had a favourable birth? No. Because he grew up in favourable circumstances and had a wonderful conversion? No. Because he had an appetite for God. But here's where the going gets tough, if we could choose the first thing without the second and the third that would be tremendous, but we can't. To know Him, not only in the power of His resurrection, but the fellowship of His sufferings. Now consider for a moment what this means: fellowshiping in Christ's sufferings. Cast your mind back to the gospel writings and consider some of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus - Matthew's gospel, the temptation, the temptation of Satan himself. On occasions the Lord Jesus Christ being deprived of His daily provisions, suffering inhumanities from His enemies, and denial by His friends, betrayal by His associates, misunderstanding by the majority of people in the nation, hatred by the privileged classes and the religious establishment - and at last the terrible and awful agonies of Gethsemane and Calvary.

Just before you pray very glibly: 'Oh Lord, that I might know You, and the power of Your resurrection, and the fellowship of Your sufferings' - remember it's dangerous to pray unless you're willing to accept in the fullest implications everything it is to fellowship in the poverty of the sufferings of Christ. A.B. Simpson was the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, he was the pastor before A. W. Tozer in his pulpit, and he had a friend who offered this singular prayer for a loved one, and Mr Simpson said that he knew nothing that ever impressed him more than this lady's prayer - this is what she said: 'I ask Thee that Thou wilt lay on me all the burdens, sufferings, trials, and needs of my friend. I do not ask to share the joys, but I ask if there be pain, pressure that I can bear, to lay it upon me in sympathy, fellowship, prayer, and the power to lift and help so that the life for which I suffer may be more free to serve and work for Thee'.

Surely what we see in our Lord Jesus Christ is that love always longs to bear another's pain. The heart of the apostle here in fellowship with Christ is brought to a point where it's willing, intensely longing, to share the very sufferings of Christ - and you see this is what happens, that the closer you get to Christ the more you suffer! It may be external, but one thing is for sure: it will be internal. The deepest element of the priesthood of Christ will be yours also: He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities, and when you come to fellowship with Christ, to know Christ, to experience the power of His resurrection, you will taste the pain of Christ.

It's not an option, the Christlike life will enter with Christ into His deep sense of need for others, into the ministry of prayer and agony for their sins and their sorrows, into the deepest thoughts and tenderest solicitude for a lost, dying, hell-deserving world. That's what Paul meant when he said in Colossians 1:24 that we would fill up the work of Christ! This is what He has left us to do: to fellowship in His sufferings. Do we know this? We all want the power of His resurrection, don't we? Yet at the same time shunning the fellowship of His sufferings, yet it's only through this suffering that character is provided and the highest purpose is realised, and we become like Him.

Thirdly and finally: to know Him in conformation of His death, to be conformed to the image of His death. This is spiritual identification with Christ in His death. Paul could say in Galatians: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me'. There must be a likeness to Him in His death before there is a likeness to Him in His life, for the life in the Christian order always arises out of death! Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. If you go home to your dinner table today, to the roast or the ham, or whatever you're eating, you're getting life out of it - but it had to die first! It's the same scenario, and the difference between suffering for Christ and death is that there is no suffering after death - that's Paul's point.

I don't think that he's talking about actual physical death, although he had to tread that pathway - but he's saying that a dead man before Christ is one for whom hurt has ceased and pain has gone. My child, if you're one that concentrates upon your own personal hurts, injustices, pains, chips on your shoulder, you're not dead. A dead person doesn't feel those things. When Paul was taken up to the third heaven, do you remember what he said? 'I knew a man in Christ fourteen years' - it was as if he didn't even know the man personally when it was himself! He had died to himself, yet when we die what do we do? Instead of decapitating ourselves and cutting the head off of our sin, we give ourselves a haircut. We don't kill our sin, we disarm our sin. We're like Nero, when he was running away from those who pursued him, his enemies, history records that he stabbed himself in about twenty places - but he was careful every time he stabbed himself that he avoided any fatal part!

The place of victory and rest as the Christian is where we are really dead, and we're not even conscious of what we're doing for Christ, we're conscious only of Christ and His resurrection. In verse 11 Paul says: 'If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. The reason why my desire is to know Christ, to be found in Christ, to win Christ, to fellowship in His sufferings, to know the power of His resurrection, to be conformed unto His death, is because there's a resurrection day coming - the out-resurrection from among corpses, the rapture, and then we will stand in judgment, and I want to be fully clothed with Christ and Christ alone! Not what I have done or who I am, but to be found in Christ when the body is redeemed'.

Remember what that mother said to the Lord Jesus of her two disciple sons? 'Grant, Lord Jesus, that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right hand and the other at Your left in Your kingdom', and the Lord began to say how that was not His to give. Then He asked them a question: 'Can you drink the cup that I'm going to drink? Can you be baptised with the baptism that I will be baptised with?'. And the answer to that question is: 'Yes' - not to the full extent of what Calvary was, but 'Yes' in the fellowship of the sufferings of the Saviour of Calvary. What do we know of it? In Luke chapter 10 Martha thought it more important to be occupied for Christ, yet Mary was at Jesus' feet occupied with Christ.

I don't know whether this ever happens to you, but sometimes I'm asked the question: 'Do you know so-and-so?'. Often I answer that question by saying: 'I do and I don't', which means I probably have met them at sometime, or am maybe even acquainted with them, but I haven't really spent much time with them - I don't know them that well. What kind of an appetite do you have for Jesus Christ, for the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, His death and the glorious resurrection when you will not be ashamed?

Oh our Father, we pray that as Christians we would have this appetite for Thee, to pursue Thee in such a way that we might win Christ, be found in Christ, know Christ in the power of His glorious resurrection, and even - because it is necessary - in the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death, that by any means we might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Lord, help us to live for Christ, and to look for eternity, in His name we pray, Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 18

"Progress In Purpose"

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Philippians 3:12-16

Philippians chapter 3 is our portion of Scripture again, Philippians 3, and we're beginning to read at verse 12. That is our text, but we'll take up verse 7 through to verse 16 to get the context. Verse 7, Paul says: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing".

I want to speak to you this morning under the title 'Progress in Purpose', progress in purpose. Dr Dwight Pentecost, who many of you are familiar with, and indeed has preached here in the Assembly over the many years of our existence, wrote a book on the subject of the epistle to the Philippians called: 'The Joy of Living'. In the book under this particular section he commentates on what Paul has said, and he relates it to an experience that he had himself when he visited some of the art galleries in the city of London. I'll just quote it to you like this, he says: 'When I was in London I found my way to several of the art museums and galleries of that city. I wanted to see some of the famous paintings I had become familiar with through art books. It was a delightful experience to walk through these corridors. I was particularly struck with one painting: two chariots were racing at breakneck speed, their wheels were just a blur of motion, the charioteers with whip in hand were lashing their horses to the expenditure of every ounce of energy that they had. Intensity was written in their eyes, in their faces, in the set of their bodies. The horses were straining themselves, it seemed, to the point of collapse. Their eyes were wild, their nostrils distended, they gulped great breaths of air as they pressed toward the goal. With the goal before them they were giving themselves unreservedly to their race. Those who had not so extended themselves had been left behind, and were an insignificant part of the background of the painting. The attention of the viewer was focused by the artist upon the two charioteers who strained toward the goal'.

Now last Lord's day morning we looked at the appetite that the apostle Paul had for the Lord Jesus Christ, and for maturity and spiritual things. You remember he said three things - his desire was that he would win Christ, verse 8; verse 9, that he would be found in Christ; and verse 10, that he would know Christ. We saw that the spiritual measure, if you like, of how mature you are in Christ, of whether or not you grow into perfection in Christ, it's all down to one thing in particular - it's not down to the privileges that you have in the matters of your conversion, it's not even down to the knowledge that you have in a biblical sense, but it's all down to one thing: the appetite that you have for the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The desire, the longing, the thirst, the hunger after spiritual things in the Lord Jesus. After Paul has told us that, that the real common denominator of all those who have attained unto spiritual maturity - some we called last week 'spiritual giants' - have this in common: that they have an appetite, they have a hunger and a thirst and desire after Christ.

Now, after telling us this, Paul now speaks to us of his own progress in attaining that purpose and goal. He rejects right away any idea that he, as the great apostle, has already attained unto this spiritual perfection. In fact, he throws right out of this scenario any consideration the theoretical Christian perfection can be at all attained down here on earth. I don't care who you are, or what you've done, or what you've not done, or what church you belong to, or what spiritual philosophy you aspire to, Paul is quite clearly saying here that none of us down here on earth can attain unto perfection in a complete sense of being perfect, holy, no spot or wrinkle of sin within us. In fact, Paul was probably, I would say, the greatest Christian that ever lived, but he himself says that he had not attained unto this. In verse 11 he said: 'If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead', verse 12, 'Not as though I had already attained', verse 13, 'Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended' - he didn't think that he had reached that spiritual perfection.

In verse 11 he had not reached that goal of resurrection perfection yet. One thing that tells us about the great apostle, and we would do well to take a leaf out of his book today, it's this: that he was spiritually realistic, spiritually realistic, and also he was spiritually honest. He saw things the way they really are, and he was honest about his own disposition spiritually speaking before God. The great apostle, consider for a moment, was not among those who say today: 'I have nothing more to learn, I have no more experiences to have, I have no more spiritual milestones to achieve' - Paul could never say that! Now note that Paul wasn't talking about his position in Christ, for in verse 15 he sees that as being perfect: 'Let us therefore, as many as be perfect', he includes himself in the number - 'Let us therefore, as consider ourselves perfect'.

Now what's he talking about? Is he contradicting himself? One moment he says he's not perfect, the next moment he includes himself with those who are perfect. Well, you've got to notice the distinction here: in verse 15 he's talking about perfection positionally in Christ. In other words, he's not standing before God in his own righteousness and his own sinless perfection, because he doesn't have it; but because Christ died for him at Calvary, and he has had faith in Christ, faith in Christ has imputed to him Christ's own perfection, His own sinless spotless righteousness. That is Paul's, and indeed every believer's, positional sanctification in the Lord Jesus - because we are in Christ, we are accepted in the Well-beloved, and we can approach unto God - that's verse 15. But when Paul says he hasn't attained unto perfection in verses 11 and 12 and 13, he's talking practically about his own holiness and sanctification. We could paraphrase it like this: 'We are perfect, but not perfect. We are complete, but not completed'.

It's a bit confusing, isn't it? Let me illustrate it like this: a newborn baby comes into this world, and the doctor examines it as soon as comes out of the womb, and he's able to pronounce to the mother and father on tenterhooks that the child is well - and he might even say to the mother and father: 'It's a perfect baby boy'. Now there is that child, seemingly to the naked eye right away perfect in all of its parts and development as it has come through nine months of gestation in the womb. But everybody knows, the parents know, the doctor knows, you know that that child has not come to full perfection - it's not fully grown, it's not perfected, it's not completed. It has all the organs, perhaps even the looks of its father or mother, but those organs in themselves have not fully grown or developed. Now that is what Paul is talking about here in verses 11, 12 and 13, when he talks about perfection. He's talking about spiritual maturity, he's talking about completeness, development in the Lord.

Although we are perfect through sanctification, through our salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, many of us - in fact all of us - have still a long way to go. We still, no matter how mature we are, have some maturing to do. What are we all working towards? - that's the question. What is this maturity, what's the final stage of it? And ultimately what is the purpose and goal of Paul's life? When will he be satisfied? When will he have attained and apprehended that for which Christ has apprehended him? Verse 21, here it is very clearly, verse 20: 'For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself'.

Paul's goal was simply this: to be like Jesus. What a goal! Therefore, I believe that we should be dissatisfied until we have the image of the Son of God conformed in us. That should be our same goal, the achievement of this ought to be our ultimate purpose in life - not satisfied until this one thing we do, we become like the Lord Jesus Christ in every facet of our lives. Let's look at this man Paul and his progress in desire and purpose, and ask a couple of things in relation to him and apply it to ourselves. Here's the first thing I see about him: he was not self-satisfied. Paul was not self-satisfied. He didn't think he had arrived, verse 12 clearly: 'Not as though I had already attained, it's not as though I think I have arrived'. You see what Paul is saying here, and especially as we look at verse 21, is this: 'Until I am completely and utterly like Jesus Christ the Lord, I have not arrived!'.

Can I just remind you very humbly, that until you are like the Lord Jesus Christ, you can't say you've arrived either. Stand up if you think you're like the Lord Jesus in a perfect sense. If you're here today, and whatever spiritual knowledge and experiences that you've had in your past, can you say: 'I am perfectly like the Lord Jesus Christ'? For until you can say that you've no right to be satisfied with your spiritual development! If you are satisfied, and you've no desire to go on further with Christ, do more for Christ, be more for Christ, be more holy, pray more, fast more, witness more, study more, my only conclusion is that you must be like Him. You must be like Him, otherwise you've no reason to be self-satisfied. Or perhaps the problem is this, the previous one we looked at last week: you have no appetite for Him, that could be the problem, that's why you're self-satisfied.

You know what happens when you lose your appetite - what's the reason for losing your appetite? It's because you're not well! You're sick! You're poorly! What Paul is insinuating here is: if you don't have this appetite after Christ, this desire to win Christ, be found in Christ, to know Christ in His resurrection, in the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death - if you've no desire to press on, and you're self-satisfied, and you think you've got it made spiritually and you've attained everything that you need - you're sick and you don't even know it! You need to consult the Great Physician for critical heart surgery even this very morning in this place. If you look at others, and this is what people often do, this is how they become self-satisfied: they look at the standards of those around them, or simply their own ideals, or what they're trying to hurdle, the standard they're trying to reach in their own heart and mind - and when they reach that standard, whether it be that of others or themselves, they become self-satisfied because they've got their goal.

This is what's happening in the church around us today - it could even be what's happening here - that you try and attain to someone that you like, someone you look up to, and once you reach their perceived standard there you stop. 'When in Rome do as the Romans' - 'if I can be like him or her, that's my goal, and when I've got it I'm going to stop'. But if your goal is Christ, that's a different thing, isn't it? You see when you follow the standards of others around you, do you know what happens to you? You become anonymous, you just blend in with the crowd, you don't stand out. Do you know what Paul says, if I can paraphrase it again for you, just to let it grip our hearts, he says: 'I can't relax, for my standard is not the standard of the saints with whom I live, my standard is the standard that God sets before me in the person of Christ'. That ought to be your standard, and if you're self-satisfied today, if you think you've arrived, you've nothing more to learn, you've no more experiences to have, you've no more milestones to achieve - God help you, because you're sick!

The self-satisfied condition is symptomatic, John tells us, of the end times. In the book of Revelation he spoke to the church of Laodicea who thought they were rich, increased with goods, they have need of nothing, and the Lord Jesus Himself came to them point-blank and told them that they were poor, they were blind, they were wretched, they were naked! They weren't rich at all, and that is this self-satisfied attitude: it breeds complacency because you think you have it made when really you have nothing and you're a pauper! But Paul had, and this is what I want you to see today, he had this holy aggressiveness. The picture that he is painting, as the great illustrator that he is, is one of an athletic arena - he's fighting, he's striving, he's competing for a prize! It's the bugle note, it's the victory cry - it ought to, as we read it, stir our hearts, make our blood throb with intensity, we ought to be given this soul-earnestness as we see the apostle's heart aflame. This spiritual enthusiasm, it ought to smite us with the desire that Paul had to win Christ, to be found in Him, and to know Him.

My question today is: does it? Does it give us that desire after Christ? Does it make us want to push on onto further ground, and win more ground for Christ in our lives? Come on now, are you self-satisfied? This is no soft spiritual sentimentalism, this is the conquering field of battle, this is akin to what you're seeing on the television screens and in the newspapers today - Paul is saying: 'Despite all that I've achieved, I can't relax, it's not time to relax, for I'm not like Christ yet!'. Until you're like Christ, my friend, I don't care who you are or what you know, you can't relax.

He was not self-satisfied, this is the second thing: he strove for perfection. He strove for this perfection, he had an appetite and that appetite made him strive for perfection. Verse 12: 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus'. Now that word 'follow after', literally means 'to over-extend one's self'. It's this picture of the horses that Dwight Pentecost spoke about in his book: they are using every fibre of their body and being, every bit of strength drawn upon the body for the pursuit of their goal and the prize - striving for perfection.

Now I want you to see three ways in which Paul did this. One: to the exception of everything else, to the exception of everything else. Verse 13: 'I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are to come, I press forward'. To the exception of all else, he excludes all other competing interests and influences in his life, for he knows that life's too short, life's too small to be scattered into a dozen directions. So what he does is: he compacts all of his desires, all his strengths, in just one direction over all - the highest and the best. Can you say that? 'This one thing I do'? Is Christ, and the things of Christ and of God, the highest thing in your life, the highest purpose, direction, desire and goal - is it Christ? Paul says in Hebrews that we're to set aside every weight and every sin that so easily besets us, to run the race, to win the prize, to the exception of everything else we're to strive for that perfection!

The second thing was: he did it with forgetfulness of the past, 'forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth'. I think I'm right in saying that no one ever reached Christian maturity until they were able to deal with the past. Maybe you find yourself stuck, today, in a spiritual sense, you can't move on. But Paul's formula is: you must forget the things that are behind. If you're going to strive for perfection and spiritual maturity, you've got to forget the past. It's not done by mind tricks or psychological mantras, saying things over and over again to yourself, it can't be cancelled out by wishful thinking - but this forgetfulness that he talks about here can only happen through confession, confession of your sin, correction of your life, and restitution. You've got to come to God and tell Him that you've sinned, you've got to correct that problem in your life and repent of your sin. Restitution means that you've got to put right whatever you can that you've done wrong in your past.

Many believers can't move on, many believers are stuck, stayed, stagnant, dead saints; and the reason often is because there's something in the past that's holding them back. The past is wiping out their future as it were. Paul is saying: 'The only way to press on is to wipe out the past'. 'You must deal with the past', he is saying, 'or the past will deal with you'. If you don't deal with it, it has a tendency of becoming your present and hindering your future spiritual advance and development. Unless you get rid of your past, your past will get rid of you. I hope you can see how clear this is, yet so many Christians are still stuck in the past. Their growth is stunted because of the past, and they say over and over to themselves and to their nearest and dearest: 'If only I could go back and undo that, if only I could put the clock back and do that a different way, and make a different choice, and go down a different road'. Paul says: 'You can do better than putting back the clock, you can forget it! Not on the grounds of psychology, but on the grounds of redemption - that if you're a child of God it's under the blood, leave it behind, forget it! Confess it, correct your ways and make restitution'. But be warned: if you don't, that haunting memory will sap all of your spiritual strength, it will dog your footsteps and handicap your life for God forever.

We all have things in our past that the old accuser would resurrect and bring before us, don't we? It could be that I'm talking to someone in our gathering today, and maybe that thing has kept you even from the Lord's table. Maybe that thing has kept you from the prayer meeting or the Bible study. Maybe that thing, whenever you get on your knees to pray, is the very thing that is brought before you time after time, and robs you of your liberty and your peace and communion with Christ. God's word to you today is: if it's under the blood, forget it! Isn't that wonderful? Tremendously liberating! But my friend, if you don't forget it, it will remain to be a bitter memory, and it will destroy everything that you can do for God - it'll never damn your soul, but it will take away your joy.

There was a story told once of a young stoic, and the stoics were the philosophers that believed that you shouldn't in any way let your life be rocked by circumstances or emotions - and you'll even know that we use this phrase today in a metaphorical sense, that someone is very stoic. It's like the 'stiff upper lip', you don't show any emotion. Well, this young stoic lad stole a fox, and his master came toward him and he didn't know what to do with the fox - so he shoved the fox up his tunic. When the officer came before him, the stoic appeared as usual without any emotion. He just stood there cold as marble, and as that fox was up his tunic, the fox was tearing out his vital organs until he dropped dead without an expression on his face! So much like the believer with hidden hurts and fears and torments, and memories and nightmares that aren't dealt with - they will rip out the very life from your spiritual existence!

How can you forget the past? Well, here's two ways - I presume that you've confessed the thing to the Lord, and you've repented of it - but here's another thing that will help: don't commit it again. There's no use trying to forget something that you intend doing tomorrow once more, and over and over again. Don't commit the sin again! Here's another thing: don't be historical. Don't sit and analyse over those faults, and record your faults in order to remember them, and neither record the faults of other people to throw them up against them!

A man met an old college friend downtown one night, and began to talk over old times of school with him. Before they realised it, it was long past midnight, and they went on their way home - but both of them were terrified at what their wives would say about coming home so late. The next day they met again, and one of them asked: 'How did your wife take you coming home so late?'. He said: 'Well, I explained to her and it was all right. What about your wife?'. 'Well', he said, 'when I came in my wife got historical' - 'You mean hysterical, don't you?' - 'No, historical, she brought up everything that had happened in the last 30 years'. Now we can do that in a spiritual sense for ourselves, but listen: we can do it for others; and we can laugh at this, but husbands and wives can do this! We can bring up past faults that are under the blood, that are trying to be forgotten by that child of God, but maybe you're raking it up again and again and throwing it in their face! You can't be historical with these faults, you ought not to remind yourself of them or remind others of them. This is a lovely translation of 1 Corinthians 13 verse 5: 'Love keeps no record of wrongs'.

When Winston Churchill visited the United States during the war years, he remarked in the course of his conversation: 'If the present quarrels with the past, there can be no future'. If the present quarrels with the past, there can be no future. Now listen: Paul isn't just talking here about the negative past, he's talking about the positive past. He causes all things to be loss to win Christ, and good things - and we saw the list of those from verses 1 to 7. Paul had a string of churches behind him that he'd planted, hundreds of thousands of souls that he'd led to Christ; he had suffered so many things that we read of in the epistles for Christ, but he saw his past not as a soft pillow to hibernate his future upon, it wasn't something to look back and say: 'I've done at all, I've achieved what I needed to achieve, I'm going to rest now - no future for me in God'. But his past, he said, was going to be a foundation, a springboard for his future - and the larger the foundation he had, his implication is this: the larger the superstructure would be that he would build for God. If you've got a great past, friend, that's tremendous, and God bless it, and God bless you - but what have you got now?

We've got a great past here in the Iron Hall...but what have we got now? The larger the foundation, the larger the superstructure should be; the larger the pillow of the past, the larger and the deeper the sleep will be. If you

have greatness in your past, it demands an even greater greatness today. Let us not, as John says, lose those things which we have wrought, but receive a full reward. Thirdly, here's another thing he could do for his purpose and progress in that he focused on the future. He did this to the exception of all else, with a forgetfulness of the past, and with a focus on the future. There are souls today in our churches calling themselves Christians who have no eyes for the future, they can't see over the heads of the things that are immediately around them. You know what I'm talking about: they don't think with foresight, they're not long-sighted, they don't look at the big picture, the panoramic view. But there are souls who see into tomorrow, who see over the heads of difficulties and disasters and even death itself, and to that one God will bless, to that one God will turn. For the man or the woman who looks to tomorrow, or looks to the future, is the man or the woman that lives by faith, because faith is the evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped-for.

We don't have time, but if we had we could turn to where Paul said that at the end of it all, just before he was about to die, martyred for Christ, he had fought a good fight, he had run a good race, he had kept a good trust. His ultimate goal was of the high calling, the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, and because he had that as a desire, and because he had a great appetite after it and he strove for it to the exception of all things, with a forgetfulness of the past and a focus on the future prize - he got it! You'll get it too, if you reach forth, if you press - an expression of the most profound earnestness which the human soul is capable of - it's not child's play, it isn't a momentary notion in a meeting like this, it is the sweep of the volcano down the mountainside, which carries everything in its fiery torrent! A.B. Simpson said 'It is the picture of a man pressing forward on the racecourse, with muscles strained to their utmost tension, with nerves alert and senses all alive to every advantage of the fray, and with his whole being intensely absorbed in the struggle for the prize which is flashing before the kindling eye from the open heavens where the great Umpire stands beckoning him on, holding out the glorious diadem'.

Well, are you self-satisfied now? How could you be? We've talked about the past, we've talked about the future, what about your present? How are you now? Where are you at this moment? Are you on the race course? Are you in the competition? Or are you in the stadium as a spectator? Are you in the fight as a contestant, or are you on the sidelines as an observer? I don't know what you're regretting now, I don't know what you're living for - whether it's your job or your family - I don't know what it is, your habits, your pleasure, your recreation, but some day, Christian, you will regret not giving your all for Christ. 'Know ye that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize; so run that ye may obtain':

'Run the straight race through God's good grace,
List up thine eyes and seek His face,
Life with its ways before us lies:
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize'.

May your desires be Paul's, and may your progress be Paul's too.

Father, we are aware that Thy word tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God, but we also know that it says that Thou art the rewarder of them that diligently seek Thee. Lord, if we have not a thirst, give us a thirst that is not quenched until we see Thee as Thou art, and love Thee with unsinning heart. Give us a hunger that will not be satisfied until we feed upon the living bread, until we sit with Thee at the Marriage Supper. Lord Jesus, give us a desire, if we do not have it yet, to win Thee, to be found in Thee, to know Thee in Thy resurrection power, in the suffering pangs of Calvary and the conformation to Thy death. Lord, let us strive towards that prize, until we see Thee and are like Thee. Let us not be satisfied with anything less, for Thy dear name's sake, Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 19

"Orientating Our Obedience"

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Philippians 3:15-21

I want to speak to you this morning from these verses on: 'Orientating Our Obedience', orientating our obedience. As I've already said in our reading, we must keep in mind everything that Paul has said in the previous verses about pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. He has exhorted us to forget that which is behind, both bad and good, and press forward for the prize of the calling of God in Christ Jesus, and indeed to seek Christ alone, to win Christ, to be found in Christ, and to know Christ in the power of His resurrection, in the fellowship of His sufferings, and being conformed unto His death. So our duty, we have already seen, as Christians, is to look to the future days, and by looking to the future it will regulate the present.

By implication that means that, as we have learned this last week and the previous weeks in our studies, that we come today to Paul exhorting us that we must now obey these truths that he has revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. In fact, he is saying to us literally in verse 16: 'Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained', or as some translations put it, 'Nevertheless, whereto we have already learned, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing'. We must start to obey the things that we have learned. I think, perhaps, in the whole sphere of Christian existence, that this is probably the most difficult thing to do. It's hard to study the word of God, to learn it, to imbibe knowledge, it's hard but it's not impossible - but one thing that seems almost, by observation, to be nigh impossible to many believers in this day and age is to obey the word of God, to move on from this head knowledge of what we ought to do, and to get down to actually doing it.

I think the reason that Paul gives why we have to obey what we have already learned is: because it is the characteristic of a citizen of heaven. It is by this, your appetite for Christ, your pressing toward the goal and the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, it is by this that people in this world will recognise that you are a child of God and a citizen of heaven. You live in the Spirit, you live in the Lord and with the Lord, and are living and waiting for the Lord in person, as He will burst from the clouds and come back again at His advent. It is by these things, obeying the word of God, that people will recognise that you are pressing toward the mark, that you're a citizen of heaven, that your purposes, goals and desires are Christ. That is why obedience is so necessary when we learn truths from the Scriptures.

I'm going to break it down for you this morning into four reasons why obedience is so necessary, and I believe by meditating on these reasons we will be able, by the Spirit's help, to orientate - our, if necessary, reorientate - our obedience towards God's Word. The first reason why Paul says that obedience is necessary is because you have and are an example. You have been given an example, and as a child of God you are to be an example to those around you - verses 15 to 17: 'Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you'. This is God's opinion, and even if you're not convinced of what you're about hear this morning, if you were to go to God and say: 'Lord, I want to know firsthand from Yourself', you would get exactly the same answer from God as the Philippians are getting from Paul. 'Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule', verse 17, 'Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example', rather than 'ensample'.

So Paul is saying: 'You've got to be obedient to what I've just said, because you have an example in me, and you are an example to those around you'. What he is saying is that the present duty of every believer is to obey the light that God has given him. I wonder if I were to ask you today what light has God given you in regards to the

teaching and the truths of the word of God, I'm sure a great many of you could testify that God has been very good to you in that regard. We thank God for the heritage of Bible teaching that we have known in this assembly all down the years, and perhaps the assembly that you have frequented, but what Paul is addressing now is that we have a duty as believers to walk and obey the light that God has given to us. As an assembly that responsibility is collective also: we have a duty to be of one mind in the light that God has given to us.

Of course, we're not advocating that we're all clones of each other, and we don't have our individual minds and opinions on the secondary things of spiritual life - but what we are saying: on the things that really matter, the essential things, we must be of one mind in the light that God has revealed to us. He's telling us not to get sidetracked off the course that leads to the prize, that's his point. The only way for that not to happen is if we follow Paul's example and those around us that are godly. That's what he says in verse 17: 'Be followers together of me, and mark those that walk as ye have an example that are walking after me too'. John Newton, the slave trader converted who wrote the hymn 'Amazing Grace', was reported to have said: 'I have ever to confess with sorrow that I'm far from being what I ought to be, and far from what I wish to be, but also - blessed be God's name - to testify that I'm far, very far, from what I once was'. Isn't that many of our testimony? That we're not what we used to be, we know we're not what we should be, but we need to reassess ourselves as John Newton did, and I believe Paul was doing in this passage. It shows that the practice of self-examination is a worthy one, and it's a good thing to keep check on your spiritual progress - not just for your own sake and for your own striving toward the prize, but also, Paul is saying here, for the sake of others. We've got to see today that as well as us having an example in the apostle and our Lord Jesus Christ, we are to be an example for those around us.

Paul is expecting that we ought to be able to look to those around us and be able to see them as examples in godliness and holiness. Now you may not know this, but it's important that it's brought to your attention today that your obedience or disobedience is an example to someone who is looking to you this very day. It might be your child, it might be your husband or your wife, your boyfriend, your girlfriend, it might be a work colleague, it might be a fellow deacon or a fellow elder or a fellow member - I don't know who it is, but you need to be aware that all of us as Christians have people who look to us as examples.

If a sailor set his course, as he does, by the stars, but sets it on the wrong star, he will never reach his intended destination. If the pilot starts flying and tunes into the wrong radio beacon, he will never reach the right airport. What Paul is saying is: 'Choose your examples very carefully, follow me and follow all those like me', and by implication, 'Be like me because others will follow you, others will look to you as an example'. Of course in Corinthians, and we'll come to this in our later studies, but Paul is not setting himself up here as some kind of Ayatollah and advertising himself, he's only asking these believers to follow him inasmuch as he follows Christ himself. That's what he says in 1 Corinthians 11:1: 'Be ye followers', the word is imitators, 'of me, even as I also am of Christ'. You see Christ is the goal, chapters 2 and 3 of this book have told us that the joy of the believer is to follow, to thirst, and to have an appetite after Christ. Therefore, when you're looking for an example, when you're going to be an example, look for that one - that man or woman - in whom you see Christ, and be a man or woman in whom Christ can be seen.

Example is a powerful force in spiritual things. You know you can read the Bible from cover to cover, and theological books until the truths are coming out your ears, and you can read about what you ought to do, and then set down the book and think: 'Well, I ought to do this, or I ought to do that', but when you lift up the life story of someone who has done it, or you see an example of someone who is doing it, you conclude not 'I know I ought to do this', but 'I can do it'! More than that, they might even inspire you to say: 'I want to do it'!

Example is powerful, for example puts life, I believe, into truth - and that's why Christian biographies have been so powerful in my life and in the life of many other believers who testify of it, missionaries and great Christian leaders down all the annals of history - to see in men and women the possibility of following hard after God and

winning the prize! It's when you see it in a man or a woman you say: 'I can do it too!'. You may even be led to say: 'I want to do it'. It makes the truth alive, it is living truth - and if you think for a moment, that's exactly what it was in the life of the Lord Jesus. Do you ever ponder how God, unlike what the Mormons teach us, did not give a revelation from heaven on tablets of stone or gold or whatever. He didn't just float down a book from Genesis to Revelation from the sky, but when He wanted to give a revelation to you and to me, the Bible says: 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us'. For if He had not dwelt among us, we would not have beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. This is God's pattern: not just to give us truth, but to personify truth, to make truth alive in personality!

One writer put it like this: 'Paul was not just a life-sized model, but a Christ-sized model. He was not showcase religion, but laboratory experience. He had lived it in the silence of Arabia, the synagogue of Antioch, the stoning at Lystra, the maelstrom of Ephesus, and now the incarceration at Rome'. Paul, from behind the bars of prison, is saying: 'Be followers of me, and follow all them that follow Christ also'. Parents, do you underestimate the impact that you're having on your children? Elders, deacons, do you underestimate the impact that you have on the church? Sunday School teacher, on your pupils; Young People's leaders, on the young people? Whether consciously or unconsciously there are people looking to us, following us as an example.

Verse 17, 'example' there is the word 'tapor' (sp?) in Greek, and it primarily was used of an impression or a mark that was made by a blow, like a stamp, a seal. Thomas, you remember, he came doubting and all the rest, the disciples told him of the Lord's revelation in the Upper Room and His resurrection, and Thomas said these words: 'Except I shall see in His hands the print', there's that word 'tapor', 'the impression of the nails, and put my fingers into the print of the nails, I will not believe'. What Thomas was really saying was: 'The marks of crucifixion are all I have to go on, and I want to see them!'. Anything else, any other impression, to Thomas was a false impression.

Now what Paul is saying to us is: we have got to be impressions of Christlikeness to the world around, leaving not a false impression. Paul could say in Galatians: 'From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks', or the brands, 'of the Lord Jesus'. Sure that's tremendous! Because of that, Paul tells us that we need to follow him as an example, but we need to be examples to follow - and surely the Philippians knew that. Didn't we look at Timothy, Epaphroditus, Silas was with them, and it's amazing: they knew what it was like to see a man in the flesh who was a man of God, who was Christ-like, whom they could point to and say: 'I'll follow him because he's following Christ'.

Next we're going to see in just a moment that Paul talks about those whom we ought to avoid. Do you know something, I think we here are great experts in knowing whom to avoid, but who is there among us that we can follow? Paul believed, we haven't time to look at it, 1 Timothy 1, that he had been saved as a pattern to those who would be saved after him, an outline of how we ought to live. We haven't just got Paul, how many men of God have you known, and women of God? He could say in Hebrews 12: 'We have a great cloud of witnesses that are egging us on, that are encouraging us with their lives and their testimony to race toward the prize looking on to Jesus'. So, we ought to be obedient because we have great examples, but we're also to be a great example.

Second: obedience is necessary because disobedience is characteristic of Christ's enemies, verses 18 and 19. He tells us: 'For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things'. You see, you have to be obedient to all that Paul has said, and all in fact that you know in the word of God, because disobedience is characteristic of Christ's enemies. Those who do not obey the word of God or follow the example of Christ even in other people around us, are the enemies of Christ. He's not talking about drunkards or harlots that made him weep, he's talking about people in Philippi who claimed to be the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ! Preaching and teaching, it may have been falsehood, but they were taking Christ's name.

I believe what Paul is implying here is: 'You are in danger, Philippians, of following the wrong examples, of being disobedient and being marked by the characteristics of those who are the enemies of the cross itself. You're following the example of the opposite of those who are following the goal toward heaven', and here are their characteristics, and Paul is saying to us today: make sure you don't imitate them, because they're heading for hell. Yes, they name the name of Christ, they come to church, they even preach and teach, but Paul says they're heading to hell - 'whose end', verse 19, 'is destruction', the word is 'perdition'.

Here's the three marks, and brethren please make sure that none of these marks are in your life. One: they feed fleshly appetites rather than spiritual ones. 'Whose glory is their belly', verse 19. The principal goal of their gratification, their desire, their purpose, their object in life is pleasure and pampering their earthly appetites - not heavenly ones! Their god is their belly! Paul says in Romans: 'For they that are such serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple'. I don't care what you say, I don't care where you go, Paul says that those whose god is their belly need to beware that they're not following the example of those who are on their way to hell, and that they're not on the way to hell themselves.

Really what we're asking you today is: do you live for the things of the earth? Come on now! Do you live for food? Do you live for clothes? Do you live for gadgets? Your car, a new car; your bike, a new bike; your holiday, a new holiday - two holidays, three holidays - what do you live for? What is your appetite for? Or is your appetite for heavenly things? Mr Herring, a great writer, said: 'The golden calf has been cast into a different form today'. Oh, if we were all worshipping and bowing down to a piece of gold or a piece of wood, we could condemn that outright - but what is the purpose of our lives? How is the golden calf cast today? Could Aaron say to us as he did to ancient Israel who worshipped the calf: 'These be thy gods'? F.B. Meyer said: 'There is no chapel in their life, only kitchen. Their god is their belly, there is no chapel in their life, only kitchen'. What he means is: a man's god is that which he gives himself to - what are you giving yourself to? Come on now! Is it your employment, is that what your life moves and revolves through? Well, your god is your belly! You are not living for God, you're not striving for the prize, and you're going to lose out! I'm not saying you're going to hell, but you're following the example of those who are going to hell because you're no different than them. What are you giving yourself to? They feed the flesh, the fleshly appetites rather than spiritual.

Secondly, they boast of sin rather than Christ: 'whose glory is in their shame'. Really what that means is that the heart of a man, you will find this, always must glory in something or other. He must have glory in some existence, and Paul is implying that if you don't glory alone in the cross, you'll glory in something else other than the cross. That's why he said in Galatians 6:14: 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world'. What do you glory in? Education? Position? Prestige? Or Christ?

The third characteristic of the enemy of Christ is that they concentrate on earthly things rather than heavenly: 'who mind earthly things'. It's like Bunyan's man, if you've read Pilgrim's Progress - there was a programme on last night about different books, and they're all voting in and Pilgrim's Progress I don't think has been mentioned - I felt mischievous enough almost to phone in and mention Pilgrim's Progress. There's a man in Pilgrim's Progress with a muckrake. He's raking up the muck, and Bunyan said he's quite unconscious of the heavenly messenger who comes along to him, holding over his head a golden crown of glory, because his eyes are on the ground completely occupied with the material task of sweeping together all the rubbish around him that is worthless! Is that what's happening to you? You're concentrating so much on earthly things that you're ignoring that which is heavenly? Can I remind you of James 4:4: 'The friendship of the world is enmity with God'.

If you're following Christ, mark this, if you are following hard after Christ that will not happen - it won't happen. If you're following Christ's example, Leeman Strauss says: 'The child of God who wants no more of the

world than his Saviour had when He was on earth'. If you're following hard after Christ, you'll want as little of the earth as Christ wanted! He lived no earthbound materialistic life, His was an upward call, His was all spiritual motives, heavenly ideals - and Paul is saying to us today, with everything you've learned in this chapter 3: 'If ye then be risen with Christ, set your affections on things above, not on the things on the earth'. In the light of heaven's possessions, he's saying, there's no trait of character, no characteristic of conduct, no acquired habit is worth the possession or retention of, if you cannot translate it and take it with you into glory it's worthless. I'm not saying it serves no purpose, I'm saying it's eternally worthless - and be sure you're giving your time to that which is eternal.

The third reason: because we belong to heaven. He couldn't be clearer on this one, verse 20: 'For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ'. He's saying that obedience shows our heavenly mindedness. The word 'citizenship' should be replaced for 'conversation', or 'commonwealth'. It's the word that we get 'politics' from, and Paul is saying that our politics, our way of life, is in heaven. We belong to another country, a city which has foundations whose builder, or whose architect and maker, is God. This is God's way of encouraging our hearts to follow the goal, because we are heaven borne, because we are born again, because we have the life of God in us - he's saying we ought to therefore be heaven bound, we ought to be driving toward that goal, not pitching our tent deep on earth.

Let me be extremely serious to you today, because this is a two-edged sword that cuts through my heart. If you never have heaven on your mind, if it has no place in your thinking, in your decision-making, in how you spend your money, how you spend your time, how you invest your energy, the possibility is - only the possibility, but you must consider it - that you are not one of heaven's citizens. Paul's point is not just about the future, I think the main point is about the present: that our heavenly citizenship doesn't begin at death, or the rapture of the church, but at conversion, when we're converted and saved. It's meant to be our present-day reality - our conversation now, he is saying, is in heaven! As one said: 'It is because we are dropping the truths of eternity and immortality and heaven out of our thinking that we are fast becoming a generation of earthbound pagans' - but it was never meant to be the case! The children of God passing through this wilderness world have heaven as a home, for our Father's abode is in heaven, many of our loved ones have gone on to heaven, our interests and our prizes and our treasures ought to be in heaven - and Paul says our Saviour is in heaven, from where He will come to bring us to be with Himself in heaven - 'from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ'. What he's saying is, as we live down here on earth, it should be as if we're living in heaven. We should be dwelling daily on the thought of His return, and of what it will be like to live with Him. We must be living with Him in spirit, and if anything ought to orientate our obedience it ought to be this: that any moment we could literally be in heaven!

Because you have an example and you are an example, because disobedience is characteristic of the enemies of the cross, because we belong to heaven, and fourthly because soon Christ will change us. Verse 21: 'Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself'. This Saviour who has already delivered us from the penalty of sin, and from the power of sin, one day soon is going to deliver us from the very presence of sin! The Revised Version says: 'Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation'. Imagine the ridiculous nature of trying to enter heaven in this body! You may think you've got a heavenly body, but you've nothing like the body that Jesus one day is going to give to you. This body, the way it is, could not enter heaven. It is subject to sin and suffering and numerous other indignities, but very soon - praise His glorious name - the trumpet will sound, the voice will cry, and we in Christ shall be changed! This corruptible will put on incorruption; this mortal will put on immortality; the dead in Christ shall rise first, and we that are alive and remain shall be caught up together to meet them in the air with the Lord, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

The sin principle, don't you hate it? Don't you strive with it day after day? It's so resident in our bodies, although we're saved and we have the new nature, on that day it will be gone! 'Who shall deliver me from this

body of death', Paul says, 'Christ! Blessed be unto Him, Christ who giveth us the victory'. It is He! Now the question that we're posed is: are you looking to, and are you living for the redemption of the body? I'll tell you, if you are obedient to God's word, you will be living for this. If you're striving for the goal, you will be living for this. There's no middle ground or grey area. You will have that sentiment that John had: 'We know', the desirous heart, 'that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him'. We will be conformed to His body of glory.

Oh, we'll be thinking about it in two Sunday's time, and what a glorious thought it is: that body which He rose from the dead with, that was transformed, John 20 says. His resurrection body that was not bound by time nor space nor substance, that was no longer subject to the laws by which the natural body is now controlled. Think of it, you people here that are suffering with your big toes and your earaches and your bad eyesight and all the rest, all that will be gone - and the millions upon millions who are suffering, little control over your body, suffering the effects of mortality in this natural existence that is broken by sin - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the transformation that Peter, James and John saw on the Mount of Transfiguration - as quick as that! You will be changed, isn't that a miracle? Isn't it wonderful? The miracle of God's divine power and omnipotence, according, look at verse 21: 'according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself'. That power with which He healed the sick, He raised the dead, He made the blind to see, the lame to walk, the same power will stop at nothing until you - you old sinner and backslider - are like Jesus!

He is able to make changes that you can't, and it is the knowledge of that that will make you obedient, and it is your obedience - strangely enough, ironically - that will motivate you to look for Christ's coming, because you're trying to obey the Lord but you know deep down in your heart that, though perfect, you're not perfected yet, and you have not apprehended, and you have not already attained. Isn't it wonderful to know that one day very soon, He's not only going to change us, but He's going to subdue everything unto Himself according to the working of His power. He's going to change our society, this evil, wicked reprobate society that we live in. This society that has torn this world that is broken and more, they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, the Bible says. Men are now living in this world by squatters rights on God's earth, men are ruling today in governments and presidencies and in monarchies by divine franchise - God is suffering them, but He's coming in Jesus, and then there'll be a government that never will be known: absolute justice, absolute equity, absolute righteousness, undisturbed security! That will be the ultimate solution of our problems, but personally it will be this: He shall change our vile body to be fashioned like unto His glorious body.

Now come on, are you obedient like this? That you follow Christlike examples, and you are a Christlike example to your son, to your daughter, to your grandchildren, to your husband, to your wife? Or does your disobedience, your feeding of fleshly and material appetites, your seeking after glorifying other things apart from Christ, your considering earthly things rather than heavenly - does it all speak that you are following those that don't even follow Christ at all, that are on their way to hell? Do you live as a citizen of heaven, and are you obedient to such an extent that you're looking for the glorious appearing and change that Christ will make in you when He comes again?

The following verses were written by Cecil Arthur Spring-Rice on January 12th 1918. It was his last night as the British Ambassador in Washington, USA, and he wrote these words - now you listen to them very carefully:

I owe to thee my country,
All Earthly things above -
Entire and whole and perfect,
The service of my love;
The love that asks no question:
The love that stands the test:
That lays upon the altar,

The dearest and the best:
The love that never falters,
The love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted,
The final Sacrifice.

And there's another country,
I've heard of long ago
Most dear to them that loves her,
Most great to them that know;
We may not count her armies,
We may not see her King:
Her fortress is a faithful heart,
Her pride is suffering:
And soul by soul and silently
Her shining bounds increase,
And her ways are ways of gentleness
And all her paths are peace'.

'Therefore my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown; so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved'.

Oh Father, we praise God if we are citizens of heaven. But oh, Father, if we are citizens, may our very lifestyle be of heaven down here. You said to the old Israelites that if they were to obey Thy word and walk in Thy promises and precepts, that it would be a heaven upon earth for them. Lord, that's what it ought to be for us. We ought not to see a great change when we pass from time to eternity, in the sense of our communion and fellowship with Thee and Thy Son, for we are as near to Thee now as we will ever be, for we are in Christ, and Christ is in God. Lord, help us. Lord, there are people in this meeting at this moment, and they are serving the god of their employment and their profession, and Christ is forgotten. Lord, we do not judge them for we forget Thee many many times ourselves. There are those who serve family and friends - oh, Father, would You deliver us - the dearest idol I have known, whate'er that idol be, help us to tear it from Thy throne, and worship only Thee. To Thy glory we pray, and for Thy coming we look, Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 20

"Happiness Needs Harmony"

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by Pastor David Legge
Philippians 4:1-5

I want to speak you this morning on the subject: 'Happiness Needs Harmony' [from Philippians 4:1-5]. This is our twentieth study of the book of Philippians, and as you've noted of course we've now entered into the fourth and the last chapter - and God willing we shouldn't have too many weeks left of this little book of joy. We're looking at 'Happiness Needs Harmony' today. Now I don't know about you, but to me nothing sounds worse than standing beside someone who cannot sing - and I'm not singling anybody out in particular by saying this. It's often quite excruciating to be in the position of standing beside someone, and maybe they don't start the same place as everybody else, or they don't finish at the same time as the rest, and everybody else seems to be in some kind of musical harmony but they seem to be on another musical planet altogether.

We could take that analogy to the army, and if you've ever seen this, there's nothing worse than perhaps a battalion or a troop who are marching out of step. You've seen the trooping of the colour on the television, at times maybe a soldier faints or he gets out of step, and it looks awful - it just takes away the whole uniformity of the exercise. Now my pet hate is when you're watching the news or the television or something like that, and a man's mouth is moving in different synchronisation to the words that's coming out - I hate that! I can't watch that whatsoever. In all of those analogies we could say this, that to enjoy these experiences there has to be harmony. There has to be harmony, the things have to be working together.

It's the same with marriage, that we often advise our young marrieds and our engaged couples that they need harmony, and we quote that little verse from Amos: 'Can two walk together except they be agreed?'. They're needs to be that agreement, the solving of problems, and a general agreement in the partnership that will make that marriage a success. I think that the greatest illustration of harmony of course, is the musical world. I don't know whether you've noticed, but generally speaking today, even in congregations of churches, singing in harmony is a dying art. Singing in parts is relegated to choirs, if there are choirs even left in many of our churches - but certainly you very seldom hear harmony in a main congregation in the public service. It seems that melody is the most common.

Now I don't want to read too much into that, but to me it's interesting when we consider that we live today in an age that is more individualistic than perhaps we can remember, an individualist society, a society where we depend on others less than we have ever done. We don't seem to learn to lean on one another as in bygone days, and that can be seen even in the streets around our district, and in your own neighbourhood where you live. Years ago, I'm told - I have to be told - that neighbours used to go in and out of one another's homes, they used to exchange bottles of milk and little dishes of sugar and so on, and even come in if there was an open door and sit down and just have a yarn with you. Now that's not done, in fact, perhaps in your neighbourhood, to speak to someone who lives beside you is seen as intruding.

We live in this individualistic age, we don't co-operate today as much as we used to in our various gifts and abilities that we have. There's not as many basses and altos, and tenors and sopranos, we all just sing the same way - if you like, we're all singing solo. I fear that because of these individualistic lifestyles there is a danger that when, as believers, and indeed in general society, when we fall out with other people there isn't as great pressure put upon us to put that thing right, because basically our lives to a large extent don't need anyone else.

Think about it, if you fell out with your neighbour - and I have to be careful because some of my neighbours are here today - but if you fell out with your neighbour, it's not that hard living on in the neighbourhood and the

house in which you live and just ignoring them, because most of the time you probably don't see them that often. So there's not as much pressure on us. Now the danger, I fear, as we come to these verses in Scripture - and everything I say today is taken directly out of the exegesis that we have before us - the danger is that this way of life can enter into the church. In an individualistic age we can be out of harmony with one another and think that it doesn't matter - or perhaps the antithesis of that, we can think that we can sing solo and do our own thing, and that we don't need the brethren round about us, we don't need their gifts and their ministries and all their resources that they have been given by God, and we can get on on our own - we don't need the rest of the choir.

Well Paul happens to come in, right into the middle of our individualistic society, and put us all straight, and it's this he says: 'Happiness, joy, needs harmony'. Do you want to have joy - joy has been right throughout this whole epistle - in every sphere of your Christian experience? Harmony will be needed in that sphere to have that joy. Now there are four areas that Paul covers in the verses that we're going to look at, and we've started a bit late this morning, so do bear with me as I try to get through this all in the time that we have. The four areas that he gives us are: one, joy with the saints; two, joy in service; three, joy in the Saviour; and four, joy in the second coming. All of these are governed by harmony with the Lord and harmony with other believers.

Let's look at the first: to have joy with the saints you'll need harmony. Verse 2: 'I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord'. Now we've looked at this verse in previous weeks because we've known already that there was a potential for a split, as it were, certainly among these two sisters in Christ, but perhaps within the assembly - a threat that this assembly that was doing so well in many respects could be severed and split with some personal difficulty between Euodias and Syntyche. So Paul comes in and urges them, and I would say it's stronger than urge, he pleads with Euodias and Syntyche, these two women, to live in harmony in the Lord. Ultimately that's what he's asking them to do, live in harmony with one another in the Lord. The reason why he pleads and calls upon them to settle their disagreement is because they are both in the Lord, because they both belong to the Lord - as it were, Lord is saying to them through Paul: 'I want you to settle your disagreements'. So Paul pleads with them.

There was this problem of disunity within the assembly. Euodias and Syntyche were among those women, Paul says, who played a prominent part in the assembly at Philippi. Euodias and Syntyche, verse 3, 'I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel', he's still talking about Euodias and Syntyche. These women had a prime move and part in the gospel effort in the church at Philippi. If you cast your mind back to the Acts of the Apostles, you will remember that it was a women's prayer meeting where Paul first preached the gospel upon his arrival at Philippi. It was from that prayer meeting that Lydia's heart was opened to receive the gospel of the Lord Jesus, and she was saved - Acts chapter 16. I want to say that any assembly that is blessed by faithful, godly praying women is an assembly that should be thankful to God. Godly women have an important part to play within the church of Jesus Christ.

Just think for a moment of the sons that were born of godly women. Sons they had trained who became leaders, giants in the church of Jesus Christ. Don't just think of the sons, but think of the services that women rendered to the church of Jesus. Think of the songs, even in modern days and in our modern era - Fanny Crosby is one - songs given to the church, written by sisters. Supplications offered on behalf of the church by women. We could cite specific examples: Eunice training up Timothy in the way that he should go, giving him the word of God that made him wise unto salvation; Dorcas in the Acts of the Apostles, with her practical needle, clothing the people of God who were naked with her charitable deeds. In the Upper Room prayer meeting in Acts 1 verse 14 we read that there were many women in the prayer meeting, and there they were upon their knees supplicating before God.

Now I do not want to be misunderstood today, there are ways that the New Testament tells us women cannot serve the Lord in the local assembly - there's no doubt about that. But let us never forget that there are many

ways laid down by God in the New Testament age of grace where women can serve the Lord in the gospel. There are many things that women can do - for a perusal of those, look to 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 in your own free time. But what Paul is looking at specifically here in our text is labouring with him in the gospel - and we have to acknowledge that there are places that women can go, that there are things that women can do, things that women can be that men cannot be in reaching souls for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Roy Lauren, the New Testament writer, says: 'Women have rendered Christ and the church an incalculable service. They have stepped in when men have failed the church by default. They have carried on when men have given up. They have established a measure of devotion and consecration seldom reached by men', and I believe he is true when you see Mary at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just think for a moment of the service that women of God have rendered to God in the home, teaching their children, bringing them up, guiding them in the way that they should go, praying for them, maybe praying for their husbands as they go out and labour in the gospel. Think of the women on the mission-field, think what we would do without women on the mission-field, for there are very few men going to the mission-field these days!

These women that Paul is talking about, Euodias and Syntyche, had shown a remarkable spirit of co-operation in the work for the Lord. They had shown teamwork in the gospel, and they were working with the apostle Paul, trying to reach other people with the word of God. Yet these two individuals had fallen out! Now we're not told what the cause was of their falling out, and maybe it's better that we don't know, but the pity is that Satan got the advantage of their quarrel - and what was tragic to the church becomes comic to the adversary. The accuser loves it when believers fall out with one another. I hate politics, I have to confess that, I used to love it but I hate it now with a passion - but sometimes my eye catches the news, or a political programme when the Unionists and Nationalists are on together, and they're debating with one another. I've often saw this sight where the Unionists start bickering with one another, as they always do; and then the Nationalists turn to one another, and they start laughing with each other because their opponents are fighting amongst themselves and they think it's comical.

Satan laughs when believers fall out in this fashion, like Euodias and Syntyche. Often the world around says: 'Well, this proves that Christianity is a farce'. Often believers, maybe you've been in a church split or something like that, and you really ask questions - how believers can say things about others, as they do, and do things to others. Whatever you do, don't let the devil get the victory, because one man has said, and I believe he is right: 'Christianity must be of divine origin, for it lives in spite of its adherents' - isn't that right? Even after all the years of bickering and strife and splits and schisms and all the rest, Jesus said He would build His church, and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. If this was only a human organisation it would be finished! Praise God it is not.

But yet this problem is still with us today, and it is still one that needs to be addressed because each of these sisters, Euodias and Syntyche, each thought they were right and neither would take the first step to make up. Paul says that there is but one way to settle this kind of disagreement, and it is the right way: in the Lord. In the Lord! They needed to be restored in harmony, they needed to be brought together in agreement once again. Paul is insinuating that it is all their responsibilities. If there's anyone falling out with anybody else, it's not just their responsibility, it is all of our responsibilities to make sure that the assembly is guarded, that strife does not deepen and separation does not become aware. You will notice that he says: 'I beseech Euodias and Syntyche', those who were the offenders, but he says to the assembly and verse 3: 'I entreat thee also'. There was a responsibility upon the assembly to make sure that these things did not happen and did not go unnoticed. What did Paul say in Galatians? 'Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted'. It is an obligation not just to the quarrelling, but to all of us. What Paul is saying is that to have joy you've got to have harmony with the saints.

The second thing that he tells us that outflows from this, is that to have joy in service you need harmony. In verse 3, look at it, he asks the man he's writing to - he calls him 'my true yokefellow', or it could be translated

'loyal comrade' or 'team-mate' - he asks this one who is loyal to him in his ministry to help these women who were quarrelling. For he says: 'They worked hard with me, and they shared my struggle, they contended at my side in the cause of the gospel'. One translation says: 'Help these two women to keep on cooperating'. These women used to co-operate, they used to work together in the gospel, but for some reason they had stopped. But Paul is now introducing to them, one: his true yokefellow who he's writing the letter to; then he mentions these women who once worked with him; then he mentions Clement; then he mentions the rest of his co-workers whose names are written in the book of life - which presupposes that there were that many of them who helped Paul that he couldn't even begin to list them in such a short epistle.

So he's bringing to us right away, I hope you can see the theme of service, and harmony in service, and how harmony is necessary if we are to work together as the church of Jesus Christ, and if we're to have that joy transcending our whole being. How many men and women who have laboured for the Lord, whether you call it full-time work, pastoral service, mission-field, are at this very day estranged from one another because of some ungodly sinful fall out? He is telling them that they don't have to see eye to eye on every issue, that's not what scriptural, Biblical unity is - we aren't producing clones and robots who think all the same way and say all the same things. You know the little quip: 'Two men looked through bars, one saw mud and the other saw stars'. Our views about things in life, and even at times certain grey areas of Scripture, are determined by subjective things like the position in our lives that we have, like the influences that we've had during our Christian experience, the environment that we live in or have been brought up in, or even the education that we've been given. We must say, we have to say, that there is always room for difference of opinion and originality of thought among the people of God.

Now you might say: 'Well, then how can we be of one mind?'. Well, that's not what being of one mind means; being of one mind is a condition that comes when we come together in the Lord. I'll explain it: diversity without division. Did you know that is possible? Difference of methods without disunity of mind is possible; a disagreement without a dispute and a departure - Paul is saying that these things are possible, and diversity at times can be a good thing; but disunity, Paul says, will destroy the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. So even when you can't see eye to eye on a certain thing, Paul urges you that for to have joy you need harmony in your serving of the Lord.

To have joy with the saints you need harmony, to have joy in service you need harmony; thirdly: to have joy in the Saviour you need harmony. In verse 4 he says: 'Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice'. 'Always be full of joy in the Lord, I say again, rejoice'. 'Rejoice in the Lord always', the Amplified Version says 'rejoice' could be translated 'delight, gladden yourselves in Him'. I want you to note a progression here for a moment, because when the problem of disunity comes into an assembly or into the life of an individual believer it often spawns the fruit of depression, and that is exactly what happened to these believers in Philippi. They were cast down, they were disheartened, they were depressed. I don't know about you, but we all experience discouragement at times in the work of the Lord and in our lives as Christians. None of us is exempt or immune from that. How easy it is for all of us to be downcast, to be discouraged, to be depressed, disheartened.

What happens usually is that the circumstances that we're in affect us to such an extent that they determine our joy and our capacity for it, and even stifle our expression of it so that we cannot feel our joy in the Lord any more - the joy of having our sins forgiven, of being in the commonwealth of God and all the rest of it, all the blessings that we are blessed with in heavenly places in Christ. For these Philippians the case was that their division and their disunity had robbed them of their joy. You know sometimes I counsel believers, sometimes often young believers, who have no joy in their salvation. One of the reasons is that the old accuser has been pointing out something to them in their past, and he has literally been pummelling them with it; battering them down, wounding them, dragging them into the muck, trying to make them feel guilty about things that Jesus bore on the cross and has wiped away with His own precious blood. One of the things I often say to those young people is this: 'The devil cannot take away your salvation, praise God he cannot do that - but one thing the devil

will do if you let him is take away your joy'. Because he knows he can't take away your salvation, the best and the greatest thing that he can do is to take away your joy.

How many believers have given him a foothold where this is concerned? Yet Paul comes in again: rejoice, joy - how many times have we heard this phrase that could be said to be 'happiness'? But it's apart from our circumstances, because if the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22 tells us that this type of deep joy that transcends all of life's circumstances and environments is something that comes from the Spirit-filled Christian's life. I look for the day when the church will be banished of all this false impression of sombreness and deadness. It makes me sick to think that many portray Christianity, Bible-believing evangelicalism, as some kind of long-faced depressive state that you're in where you can't enjoy anything! That's not what I'm in, thank God! The Christian life is a fountain of joy, and each of us, Paul says, are to guard that joy - for there are numerous agitations around us in this world that would cause us to be cast down, that would rob us of that joy. We need to guard against it.

One writer said: 'This joyous spirit is to be maintained at all times, and in all circumstances, for any lapse from it weakens our defences against a settled state of depression'. When the source, now mark this - maybe you're sitting here today, and you say, 'I can't rejoice in my health. How can I rejoice? Look at what I'm going through! Look at what I'm suffering! I can't rejoice, my children aren't saved, my children are putting me through a nightmare! I can't rejoice, my husband's bad to me, or my husband's not saved, and I wish he was saved, and we just don't have as many things in common as we used to have when we were first married, there's a division between us, there's a wedge coming and pulling us apart'. Listen: 'Rejoice, I say again, rejoice in the Lord'!

I'm sure very few of us could rejoice in our circumstances. He doesn't ask us to rejoice in our circumstances, he asks us to rejoice in the Lord. But the only way to rejoice in the Lord is to have harmony with the Lord and with the Lord's people. When the source of your rejoicing is the Lord, you'll be able to say with Habakkuk: 'Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation'. At times we can't rejoice in the things that are around us, but praise God we can rejoice always in the Lord. We see the Saviour Himself in the Upper Room at the Last Supper, staring Gethsemane and Calvary and the face, and what did He speak of in John 15:11? 'My joy'.

It's interesting to observe that here the exhortation to rejoice is associated with the exhortation for these quarrelling saints to settle their differences. Christians cannot be rejoicing if they are in disagreement with one another. Disunity, Paul is saying, is the destroyer of joy - but joy is the outgrowth of love. The fruit of the Spirit as I've said, but go on in the fruit of the Spirit: the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy - joy comes from love. If you love the Lord you will rejoice in the Lord, if you love the brethren you will rejoice with the brethren, if you love your enemies you will rejoice over your enemies - and the secret of constant joy is this fellowship with Christ and with His own.

Jowett, the great preacher, put it like this - and I couldn't put it like this, so that's why I'm just reading out what he said: 'Christian joy is a mood independent of our immediate circumstances. If it were dependent on our surroundings then indeed it would be as uncertain as an unprotected candle burning on a gusty night. One moment the candle burns clear and steady, the next moment the blaze leaps to the very edge of the wick and affords little or no light at all. Christian joy has no relationship to the transient settings of life, and therefore it is not the victim of the passing day. At one time my conditions arranged themselves like a sunny day in June, a little later they rearranged themselves like a gloomy day in November. One day I am at a wedding, the next I stand by an open grave. One day in my ministry I win ten converts for the Lord, and then for a long stretch of days I never win one. Yes, the days are as changeable as the weather, and yet the Christian joy can be persistent. Where lies the secret of its glorious persistency? Here is the secret' - listen! - 'Lo, I am with you all the days'. In

all the changing days He changeth not, neither is weary. He is no fair-weather companion, leaving me when the years grow dark and cold. He does not choose my days of prosperous festival, though not to be found in my days of impoverishment and defeat. He does not show Himself only when I wear a garland, and hide Himself when I wear a crown of thorns. He is with me all the days: the prosperous days, the days of adversity, the days when the funeral bell is tolling, and the days when the wedding bell is ringing. All the days: the days of life, the days of death, the days of judgment'. Isn't that it?

If you're rejoicing in the Lord you will have harmony with the Lord, and you will have that deep joy in your heart. Fourthly and finally, I'm going on a little while more because we started late today. Verse 5: 'Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand'. To have joy in the second coming you need harmony. We've seen that to have joy in the saints you need harmony, to have joy in His service you need harmony, to have joy in the Saviour you need harmony, and now to have joy in the second coming you need harmony. He's saying: 'Let everyone see that you're considerate to all people in all that you do, because the Lord is coming soon'. Another translation puts it: 'Let your gentleness, or your forbearing spirit, be evident to all. Let all men know and recognise your unselfish considerateness'.

Remember that this assembly is full of disunity and depression, and all of this has robbed the saints of the desired peace - and we'll hear about that in the next Lord's day we study this portion. But he says: 'Let your moderation', or a better translation, 'forbearance, or your yieldedness, your gentle considerateness, your sweet reasonableness, your agreeableness, your pliability, your courtesy' - really what he's saying is: 'This is the opposite of your obstinacy and your self-will, and your wanting your own way all of the time'. Many people have turned this word 'moderation' about and used it as a cloak for sin, and said: 'Oh, it's alright for Christians to drink moderately, and smoke moderately, and go to the dances moderately, and all the rest' - that is not what this means at all. Those things should be thrown out right away. The Syriac version says 'sweetness', and I think the best translation is this: 'Sweet reasonableness'. 'Let your sweet reasonableness be known unto all men'.

The opposite to an unyielding spirit, to being harshly dogmatic, self-determined, to always dominating your character and your views - and it takes the place, when we are like this, of meekness and of gentleness of Christ. It stifles the spirit of grace that was in Christ welling up within us and ministering to other believers. There was disunity between Euodias and Syntyche because one was determined to have her way. Paul wasn't calling them to sacrifice right principles, he is pleading for a mildness of disposition, whose noble impulses of gentleness and yieldedness urge the grace of giving up - to give up your right, that is sweet reasonableness. Oh, to God, if we had more of it about our church and every church - sweet reasonableness! Let it be known unto all men!

Someone might say: 'But if I yield I lose ground, and I may lose out!'. Paul says: 'That's not what the worry is meant to be', why? For the Lord is at hand! Use sweet reasonableness because the Lord is at hand. Now that could mean two things - it could mean the Lord is near, or it could mean the Lord is coming soon. The Lord is near in the sense that He'll provide for you, He'll never let a child of His own lose out - the Lord is standing by. Let me pause for a moment: who was standing by Paul? Chained to his arm there was a Roman soldier. You could say the devil himself was standing by Paul, but it didn't matter that the devil was breathing down Paul's neck, and he was in prison, all that mattered was that the Lord was standing by. Another was near, closer is He than breathing, nearer than hands and feet. If you could realise, if we could all realise that the Lord is here even this morning! All the foolish bickering and pride would cease, and how quickly we would be reconciled to one another.

It could also mean He is coming again soon, personally, and He will recompense on that day all those who have forfeited their rights. Praise God, there's a day of reckoning coming - and I can put my head down and take the blow because I know that one day justice will be done! Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay. 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age'. He'll never suffer one of His own to be a loser. Can you imagine what would happen if we poured this sweet reasonableness into our home, upon our children, our

husbands, wives, our friends and neighbours, even our enemies? Wouldn't it be a breath of summer and a gleam of sunshine as we passed them by and spoke to them and acquainted with them day by day?

Paul says in verse 1, and with this we finish: 'Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown'. They were saints that he'd won for Christ in his ministry, and when a servant like Paul stands at the Judgment Seat of Christ, that will fill his heart to see the joy that comes from mature believers getting on together, working together, having harmony with one another in service, with the Saviour, and looking for the second coming. He'll be filled with gladness!

Wasn't it Rutherford who said: 'Oh, if one soul from Anwoth meet me at God's right-hand, my heaven will be two heavens in Emmanuel's land'. When he that reaps and he that sows will be together, and all the labourers and all the saints will be in glory forever - no matter what our differences have been down here. I think what Paul insinuates to us today is: wouldn't it be good if here and now we learned to get on with one another, because we will be in harmony in heaven! Seeing we are citizens of heaven, should we not seek harmony down here? If we do, it will bring great joy.

Our Father, we pray that Thou will pour in the spirit of healing into this meeting this morning. If there be any disunity, if there be any depression, if there be any lack of joy in our salvation, if the accuser is hindering us enjoying our wealth in Christ, Lord may You smite him a fatal blow today, and give the victory once again. May we all rejoice, regardless of our circumstances, in the Lord. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 21

"The Path To Peace Of Mind - Part 1"

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Philippians 4:6-7

Just two verses, verses 6 and 7, and I want to speak to you today on 'The Path To Peace Of Mind', the path to peace of mind. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus".

Now as we have been travelling through this epistle, we've found that the apostle Paul has been encouraging these Philippian believers to emulate the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Of course the Lord Jesus is our Saviour, He gives to us, by faith in Him, imputed righteousness. That means that we can never live up to a standard that is acceptable with God in God's holy sight - and therefore in order to be saved and be acceptable with God and enter into God's heaven, Jesus has to give us the righteousness of God by faith. He gives us, if you like, His goodness to get us to God's presence. So we can never, in any sense, really live up to the example of the Lord Jesus - but once you're a Christian, once you're born again, you're given a new life, and the Spirit of God lives within you and enables you by faith to live, we are told, like Christ.

Let us never forget that, that we are Christians - Christ's ones, Christ's followers and disciples - and we are to emulate, by the Spirit, His example. Of course that's what he says in chapter 2 and in verse 5, it is if you like the crux, or the summing up of the whole of this epistle: 'Let this mind', or this attitude, 'be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus'. So whatever was Christ's attitude, that is to be the attitude of the child of God and disciple of the Lord Jesus. If we had time we could look at Galatians chapter 5 and see that the attitude of Christ is to be seen in the believer by what is called the fruit of the Spirit. Now I don't know whether you're familiar with those, but the first three fruit of the Spirit are given in chapter 4 of Philippians. We've been looking at them in past weeks, perhaps you haven't realised it, but in verse 2 Paul beseeches Euodias and Syntyche, two warring factions, sisters in the assembly in Philippi, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. He entreated them to work together, and effectively to love one another, to stop fighting with each other and to love each other. So there is the first fruit of the Spirit: love.

If you look at verse 4, this was our last study: 'Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice' - the second fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, we're going to look this morning in verse 7 at the third fruit of the Spirit: 'And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus' - peace! Love, joy, peace. Now peace is one of the most precious of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit; so precious that it is the legacy that has been left behind by the Lord Jesus when He was on His way to the cross, resurrected and ascended to heaven, He has left us this great peace that is beyond all comprehension the Bible says. In fact, when the Lord was in the Upper Room in those famous verses in John chapter 14 and verse 27, he said to them: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid'.

If there's anything that this old world is seeking today, whether psychologically or emotionally, or nationally or internationally, it is peace. But what I want you to notice as we look at the path to peace of mind from God's perspective today, is that this is not the peace that the world gives or that the world seeks after. This peace is God's peace, God's peace! It's not a peace that springs from your own self internally, whether from your emotion, your heart or even your mind. It's not acquired through psychological somersaults, or the particular disposition of personality and character that you have been born with, or that you acquire in whatever means

possible. That's not what we're talking about here, we're talking about a supernatural peace that comes from God outside of humanity.

Let me also say that we're not talking about peace with God. Peace with God comes through the blood of the Lord Jesus that He shed on Calvary, that we may be reconciled to God and have our sins forgiven. Let me say that a prerequisite to know God's peace is to have this peace through the blood of His cross, and if you're not a Christian today and you've been grappling with how to get peace of mind and peace of heart, and tranquillity and peace with yourself and peace with God, that can only happen by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice at Calvary. You cannot have God's peace without peace with God. But yet this God's peace is not equated with peace with God, but it is the peace of God Himself. Let that be very clear in your mind: what we're talking about today is God's own calm, God's own restful heart. Whatever that really means, to know God's calm and restful heart as our own personal possession - if you imagine this for a second, it is God filling the human heart with His own divine stillness. It is the peace of God.

Now I hope you're sitting there this morning saying: 'How can I get it? How can this be mine?'. Well there are three things that these verses outline for us, and they're very simple and they all lead to this peace of mind. The first is this: worry about nothing. The second: pray about everything. The third: be thankful for anything. We will find that those three factors in the equation will lead to the peace of God that will guard your heart and mind through Christ Jesus.

So let's look at the first today: worry about nothing. Now I want to make this so simple, because the ministry from these two verses is so practical that I don't want us to miss it, I don't want any of us to go away and not really take something with you. What is worry? We need to ask that question right away: what is worry? Now let me say that when Paul says: 'Be careful for nothing', that really what he's saying is: be anxious for nothing, or don't be worried about anything. When it says 'careful' it's a little bit misleading in that translation, because there is a legitimate care and a legitimate concern that we ought to all have about the things of our lives. What Paul is encouraging here is not a lack of carefulness with our lives or our livelihood, not a lack of thoughtfulness, and I think that some of us could be doing with a greater carefulness and thoughtfulness about the way we dress, about the way we look, about the way we discipline ourselves and go about our daily business. Paul is not encouraging us to neglect ourselves, or to be unconcerned in any way with the affairs and the effects of life and its circumstances. What Paul is talking about is excessive carefulness. Excessive carefulness that spills over from a legitimate concern and care, to something that is illegitimate, to something that is excessive and that transgresses into the realm of worry and anxiety.

Let me tease it out a little bit more for you. How do you know when your care and your worry is excessive? Well, here's three things to judge it by - first of all, if you're more anxious about what you desire than what God's will is, you're too careful. Many people believe that peace comes when you get what you want, when you get that bank balance that you want, or the car that you want, or the home that you want, or the health that you want, that then peace will come into your life. That is not the case, but the Bible teaches and testifies that the peace of God comes when you seek not what you want, but what God wants. So you are anxious, over careful in your life, if you're striving after your own dreams, imaginations rather than seeking God's will.

The second way that you know when your care is too excessive is when you hurry into hasty and ill-advised situations. When you get into a frenzy, to such an extent that you make decisions quickly and unadvisedly and in the heat of the moment, that is a sign that you are over careful and that you're too anxious and that you worry too much. Isaiah said in Isaiah 28:16: 'He that believeth shall not make haste'. Hurry is part of worry, but to be a careful person that waits on God, you don't need to hurry because God is in no hurry; and God is an eternal being, He's outside of time, and time is not a factor or an issue with God - therefore we need not hurry or make haste in our decisions.

The third way that we can know that our care is over excessive is when we are constantly agitated in a phenomenon of unrest. Do you ever feel like that? Like your insides are convulsing with pins and needles, there's this impulse within you that seems to be taking all life and vitality away from you, and it's this unrest. It's a sign that you're over careful about many many things, and unrest - if anything - is not a characteristic of peace or of faith.

You might say that these three signs of over anxiousness and excessive care could be characteristics of our own society in which we live today - to be more anxious about what you want than what God wants, to hurry and to have haste to make ill-advised decisions, not wait upon God, and thirdly to be constantly agitated and under a phenomenon of unrest. One Chinaman on one occasion was asked to sum up our Western generation, and he summed it up in three words: 'hurry, worry and bury'. It would seem, wouldn't it, that that's a summary of most of our lives? Don't misunderstand Paul here, he's not belittling our problems, he's not saying that you should have no cares at all, that you should just blow it all to the wind, that's not what he's saying - but what he is saying is that what is important in life is what you do with your cares, whether you take your cares upon yourself and try to sort them out by worry and anxiety and excessive carefulness, or whether you cast your care upon God.

If you like, that's the difference between legitimate cares and illegitimate ones - the illegitimate ones are anxiety, worry. F. B. Meyer says, the Bible scholar, that this word 'anxiety' in English comes from the root of 'anger' - 'an', the beginning of 'anxiety', 'an' 'anger' - and the root of it actually refers to the physical act of choking! Isn't that a wonderful picture of worry? You feel you're being choked, that the air is not being able to get to the airways, or that the water is coming over your head and it's going to drown you, and you can't keep your head above the water. What Paul is saying is that anxiety and worry chokes life and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So I hope we're clear on what worry is and when care is needlessly excessive. But let's answer another question before we go any further: what do we worry about? It's often the way that we can know what worry is: what are the things that we worry about? Well statisticians at the University of Wisconsin in the United States studied this, they came up with this result, that average individual worries can be divided into four different categories and percentages. They say that the first thing, top of them all, people worry about things that never ever happened - not just never happen, but never ever happened and materialised - and that section came to 40% of the people surveyed! Mark Twain, who wasn't a believer, said: 'I am an old man and have had many troubles, most of them never happened'. Isn't that right? We tend to worry more about things that not only never happen, but never ever materialised in our existence.

The second category was people worrying about things that had gone in the past, that had been over and finished, and that could never be changed with all the worry in the world - 30% of people were worrying about those things that were dead and gone, and time couldn't be put back to rectify. The third category was people who worry about petty and needless worries, 20% of those people - silly things, maybe they are legitimate concerns, but where those concerns blow over into excessive anxiety and worry and nervousness. The Swedish proverb put it well when it defined these worries: 'Worry like this gives a small thing a big shadow'. Mountains out of molehills, isn't it?

Then the fourth category, these statisticians in Wisconsin called legitimate worries. They came to only 8%. Let me say, according to the word of God, there are no legitimate worries. It says of Martha in Luke's gospel chapter 10 that she was 'careful', it's the same word, 'anxious' about many things. Maybe they were legitimate things, but she let them crowd into her heart and take over her life, while Paul says we should be careful not about many things but about nothing! In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus Christ used the same expression when He said this in our English version: 'Take no thought', it's exactly the same Greek phrase, 'Take no thought, be anxious and careful about nothing'. He was speaking in the context of being worried about your

food and your drink and your clothing and the shelter over your head, or any facets of your earthly future and well-being. If you go to Matthew chapter 13 the Lord Jesus told the very well-known parable about the sower who went to sow seed, but one of the things the Lord Jesus said was that some of the seed was sown and the weeds and the thorns and thistles came up and grew around the seed and choked it. He said that those thorns and thistles and weeds were the cares of this world! Do you know what the cares and the worries and over excessive anxiety of the world does? It chokes the word of God in your life, and it also stifles and suffocates God's fruitfulness that He wants to outflow from your life by His Spirit. Do you see it? These things that we worry about...

I wonder are you a worrier in our gathering today? Some of these Philippians must have been, because Paul is telling them, and ordering them as he orders us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: stop worrying! It's very clear, and that's what I want you to see just now. There's two things I want you to see about worry, but the first is this: worry is sin. Did you know that? That worry is sin? John Wesley, the great Methodist evangelist said: 'I would no more worry than I would curse or swear'. It's equally as much a sin as any other sin, and just as any other sin in the life of a believer robs you of your peace between you and God, and the peace in your own heart, so worry does exactly the same. I wonder, when you find yourself worrying, biting your nails, or your insides being wrenched like a wet rag being wrung out, do you stop in your tracks, do you get on your knees, do you lift your head high to heaven and do you confess it as sin? That's what it is, it's just as much a sin as adultery or murder or idolatry - yet how often do we as believers treat anxiety and worry as some kind of light thing before God. You hear people say: 'Well, that's just me, that's my make-up, that's the way I am, I'm just a worrier'. God says that when you worry you need to realise that you have fallen into sin.

Now let's look at what why worry is sin. I'm not saying that sometimes the reasons for our worries are not legitimate cares, but the problem is how we approach our cares and our concerns. Worry comes when you face a problem, and you feel your utter inadequacy to overcome it, isn't that right? When it's out of your control and you start to worry about it. Now, the sin comes in when you determine that you're not going to give that concern over to God, but you're going to take that concern upon yourself - and even though you know that you don't have the resources to meet that concern, you think 'Well, I'll have a good go at it anyway, at least in my mind and in my heart'. Paul says, and the word of God testifies right throughout it all, that if we don't transfer that sense of inadequacy to God's sufficiency, we will worry - and worry is sin.

Herbert Lockyer, the great scholar who years ago came from the States to preach here in the Iron Hall I believe, said that worry is sin in that it produces doubt in the mind of a believer in threefold directions. Listen to this carefully: first of all God's love is doubted when we worry. There's no doubt about it being a sin, here's it clarified for you: His love is doubted because worry implies that He cares little for His children that He sent His only begotten Son into the world to die for. Are you doubting the love of God? Secondly he says God's wisdom is doubted when we worry. It's as if God is not able to plan for His own children, He doesn't know what is best for them in the plan that He wants to take them down. Are you doubting God wisdom? You are if you worry. Thirdly he said that God's power is doubted, because it's doubted that His grace is sufficient for every need that comes across your path. Can you see how worry is such a sin? God's love, God's wisdom, God's power is doubted!

William Ward put it like this: 'Worry is faith in the negative', in the reverse, 'trust in the unpleasant, assurance of disaster, and belief in defeat' - and I would say today on the authority of God's word, worry is a form of practical atheism because it betrays a lack of trust and faith in God. Do you see how serious this sin is? It's a sin! You heard about that guy, hanging off a cliff I think last night on the news, and you know what he did: he cut off his arm! Awful! He cut off his arm, and the Lord Jesus said: 'If your hand offend you, cut it off; if your eye offend you, pluck it out - cast it away!'. There's no negotiation with sin, and worry is as big a sin as any here! What do we do? Do we talk about it? No, we don't talk about it. Do we worry about our worrying? No, we don't do that either. We cast it away! Because worry, first of all, is sin; but secondly see this: worry is the enemy of God's peace.

William Ward also said these words: 'Worry distorts our thinking, it disrupts our work, it disquiets our soul, it disturbs our body, it disfigures our face, it destroys our friends, demoralises our life, defeats our faith, debilitates our energy, it unfits us to meet our difficulties, it prevents us from thinking clearly, it causes our hands to tremble so much that we cannot perform any delicate operation at all. Worry is what causes the crease on your brow, it's what ties your stomach in knots and makes you irritable and hard to get along with'. There are even those who, when they find themselves not worrying, that they start to worry about not worrying. I can see some of you are that person. The poet put it like this:

I've joined the new Don't Worry Club,
And now I hold my breath,
I'm so afraid I'll worry
That I'm worried half to death'.

God gives us a command: don't worry - and it's 'Don't worry about anything!'. Can you see the magnitude of this? The command is unconditional and unlimited, not even worrying about your own spiritual life. It doesn't say don't be careful, and some of you could do with being - and I include myself in this - more careful about our spiritual walk, but not to the extent of over anxiousness, where it eats into us and it destroys us! One person said: 'Ulcers don't come from what you eat, but they come from what's eating you'. I wonder what's eating you today? Paul says that whatever it is, even your spiritual life, your friends, even your answers to prayer, even the highest and the holiest things, Scripture consistently from beginning to end forbids worry because it is a sin and it robs you of God's peace.

So here's the first step on the path to peace of mind: worry about nothing. Here's the second step: pray about everything: 'Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God'. Pray about everything - now you might say: 'Well, I do try and pray about everything, but what kind of prayer brings this peace and stops my worrying?'. Well here it is simply: it's prayer that prays for everything. Prayer that prays for everything and anything, nothing is excluded - you bring your cares to God. You're not taking them on yourself, you're not trying to work them out in your own mind and in your heart, and trying to solve the unsolvable, trying to meet the impossible with your finite mind and heart and power and impotence - but it is bringing your cares and turning them into prayers, and giving them to God.

C. H. Spurgeon, the old preacher, put it well when he said: 'Prayer is the cure for care'. That might be too simple for you, but that's the fact - look at verse 6, and there are three different words used for prayer in this verse in the Greek language. The first is translated in English just 'prayer', it means general prayer, adoration and worship to God and devotion to Him as you come to Him. Sometimes we rush before God into His presence, and we fail to reverence Him, we fail to hallow His name when we come to Him, and we ask for the things that we need before we recognise the God that we're coming to. You know, I feel that if we really saw the mighty nature of God, the majesty and the power and the character of Him, we would be infused with faith as we get a glimpse of God and His greatness, His character and His ability, and it would help us before we come and ask for the necessary things. There's a lesson in prayer in itself, when you bring your needs, every need before God, don't forget to reverence Him, don't forget to worship Him, don't forget to get a glimpse of the King that you come to, the petitions that you bring to Him.

The second word is the word 'supplication' - supplication, it literally means an earnest specific request. It's not a half-hearted prayer, but it's a prayer where you're actually pouring yourself into it, you're pouring out your soul to God as an offering for specific things. Not just generally, 'Lord bless the missionaries, Lord bless the evangelists, and the pastors, and the sick, and the elderly, and all the rest' - but coming specifically with that care that you have and bringing that care to God. The third word that's used is 'requests', 'supplication, making your requests known unto God'. There could be a different sense that this is different from supplication, this is prayer in detail - not just specifically, but in detail, because God is interested in every minute detail.

You might look at this and say 'Prayer and supplication, requests, what's the difference in them?'. Well Guy King, the commentator, I think defines it well, he illustrated it like this: 'God is interested in the concert as a whole, the programme in particular, and the items in detail'. Isn't that lovely? The concert as a whole, the programme in particular, and the items in detail - or put it like this in our context: He is interested in this meeting in general, but He is interested in the one heart in particular that is laden down with cares, but He's also interested not only in that one heart, but each individual item and detail that is your care! George Mueller, that great man of faith, we think of his life in prayer in general, don't we? The many things that he prayed for, and we would think of his orphanages in particular, and we would think of the children's welfare in detail, every little head of every boy and girl in that place - and isn't it wonderful that we are encouraged to bring to God our cares: the big things, the little things, no matter how daft we think them to be we're to bring them to God.

I hear some clever clogs who at times say: 'Why do you have to let God know about things that He already knows about? Doesn't it say in the Bible that He knows what we're going to ask before we even ask Him?'. Of course it says that, and don't get me wrong, I don't believe we should be pointing things out to God that God already knows - sometimes you'd think God didn't know some of the things. You hear some people say in the prayer meeting: 'Lord, I don't know whether You saw the news tonight, but...' - as if the Lord didn't see it! We don't need to tell God things He knows, and let me say we don't need to preach to God in the prayer meeting either, but when we bring our cares unto God and requests, what we're doing is communicating to God the transference - we're transferring our cares from ourselves unto Him! By doing that it becomes more than a prayer, but it becomes an act of faith - that's why we request specifically, it's not some kind of psychological exercise that only affects the one who prays. Listen to this: prayer makes a difference! It changes things - it changes people, I know, but it changes not just you but the things that you pray about!

Worry about nothing, pray about everything, and thirdly be thankful for anything. I know there are some dear souls in this gathering, and I do not want to be insensitive to you, and you're saying: 'Well David, I've prayed like you've just been talking about, and I haven't got what I've asked for. It seems that my circumstances only get worse and worse'. Well, Paul says the requests that you make are to be made known unto God, but the supplication is to be with thanksgiving - this is thankful prayer that he's insinuating is to be thankful for anything. You're to be praise-ful as well as prayerful, and I would say that even those who succeed among us in prayer, and I would imagine that there are very few of those, would have to confess that you fail where this is concerned, to bring your thanksgiving to God. Not only thanking Him for whatever He's already done, but I think what's insinuated is thanking Him for what He's going to do!

I think for you, soul that's been praying for many years, about maybe one thing in particular, this praying with thankfulness indicates that your will is surrendered to God. I think that's what it means, that you're asking, you're pleading, you're weeping, you're breaking your heart for this particular concern - but you're also surrendered to thank God for anything, even if He doesn't bring it to pass now. This is how the peace of God will come into your heart and flood your soul, when you're surrendered to God - and I believe more than that, you might say: 'Well I can't do that until I get what I want' - but this is the way to get what you want! Even to come in faith in such a capacity to thank Him by faith for what that He is going to do, even though you cannot see Him doing it.

Now I know that people might think: 'Well, David, what do you know about what you're talking about today? You've never been through what I'm going through. You haven't a notion'. Well, you're probably right, I don't - but Paul did. Wasn't he in prison? Wasn't he suffering? This isn't just some bombastic preacher and airbag, pontificating to those who know he doesn't know what he's talking about. This is a man that's suffering, and he says: 'Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything with supplication, with thanksgiving, make your petitions and your requests known to God and the peace of God will flood your heart and mind!'. What he's saying is: 'Don't come in prayer with a spirit of pessimism, but come in faith'. Sometimes the prayer meeting

would depress you! People praying as if God couldn't move, as if God couldn't do anything, as if God had forgotten our predicament! God is a God who can do all things!

I love those three in the fiery furnace: 'God is able to deliver us, but even if He doesn't we'll worship Him! We'll praise Him!'. One has said: 'If a life full of care is filled with prayer, and if that prayer is filled with praise, it will result in peace'. It will result in fourthly, what he has called the peace of God that will guard your heart and mind. Please don't get away from this worry issue, see that this peace is not a matter of chance, it's not down to luck or faith - it's a matter of choice! Are you going to keep your cares yourself? Are you going to give them up to God? To know the peace, the very peace of God? What am I talking about? I'm talking about the peace that was in the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself throughout all the agitating scenes on His journey. Imagine the last moment of His life, His arrest, His death on the cross, and right throughout it all He bore in His heart the peace of God, resigned with unbroken calm to God's will. That peace can be yours!

Jesus said: 'These things have I spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world'. Imagine Him: He is spat upon, He is mocked, He is scourged, crucified, and never for a single moment does He lose His peace or His balance in the midst of the excitement of the garden, being led forth as a criminal to Calvary, He was there a miracle of peace! So much so that when Peter cuts off the servant of the high priest's ear, Malchus, He is able in that peace and disposition of tranquillity to heal his ear. When standing before Pilate the royalty of his manhood was so apparent that the Governor himself was convinced that he had done nothing amiss, and he even for a moment became the advocate of Christ himself.

I wonder are there times when the storms have wrapped your inner lake, how often the fever of cares in this world has entered because there's been no barrier to stop it, and the pulse of your soul has risen to fever heat until you have felt the choking of anxiety and excessive care around your neck? Can I tell you: there is a barrier that is available, it is the peace of God which literally garrisons your heart and your mind, it's like an army of troops around your heart to stop these negative thoughts coming in, and it transcends all understanding! It's beyond comprehension, and see the opposite of that: we try to understand our problems, we try to sort them out, make them right in our mind, but this peace - you can't understand it! You can understand why when the sun is shining everybody's happy, that's not beyond understanding. When friends and comforts surround you, when you've got health and wealth, but what is beyond understanding is when all those things are taken away and the peace of God is a guardian and a garrison to your heart - the word is literally 'shall keep', actually a mounted guard standing as a sentry around your heart, patrolling the gates of your mind, the outposts of your being, standing in faithful and protective service at the gateway of your feelings to act against any threats, intrusion and disturbance - because your mind is not on your cares, but it's on God!

Didn't Isaiah say: 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee'? How can you do it? Well, it's so simple it's profound. It's what Peter said in 1 Peter 5 verse 7: 'Cast all your care upon me, for I care for you'. Can I finish with a story or two to apply it to you? A lady said to her husband: 'Why can't you sleep? You've been walking up and down, pacing the bedroom floor from 3am in the morning'. He says: 'Honey, I've borrowed a thousand pounds from the next-door neighbour, and I haven't got it to give him back. I can't pay him and I've to pay him back tomorrow'. The wife jumped out of bed, flung open the windows, stuck her head out and shouted: 'Sam! Sam!'. After a few minutes the groggy neighbour opened his windows, and stuck his head out: 'What is it?', he mumbled. 'You know that thousand pounds that my husband owes you?'. 'Yes!'. 'Well, he hasn't got it!'. She closed the windows, went back to bed, turned to her husband and said: 'Now you go to sleep and let him pace the floor!'.

But isn't that it? Cast your care on him. A man used to worry about everything, and his friends knew him as a chronic worrier. One day his friends saw him with a smile on his face, whistling, and they said: 'Can that be our mate? It can't be...but it is!'. They stopped him and they said: 'What has happened?'. He said: 'I'm paying a man

to do all my worrying for me'. 'You mean you aren't worrying any more?'. 'No! And whenever I'm inclined to worry, I just let him do it for me'. 'How much do you pay him?'. He said: 'I pay him £2,500 a week'. They said: 'Well, how can you afford that?'. He says: 'Well, that's not my worry!'.

Friends, can I recite to you J. B. Phillips translation of 1 Peter 5:7? Listen: 'You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon Him, for you are His personal concern'. Worry about nothing, pray about everything, be thankful for anything, and the peace of God will defend your heart through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our Father, we thank Thee that Thou art a compassionate, and a caring, and a loving God. We thank Thee that Thou art always there, but how often we carry our burdens ourselves when there's no need. Lord forgive us of this sin, but give us the grace today to cast our burden upon the Lord, for He shall sustain us, He shall not suffer the righteous to be moved. Lord, those who have come into this place heavy-hearted, may they go with the peace of God garrisoning their heart and mind through Christ Jesus. Those who do not know the Saviour and do not know this peace, that they will take Him as their own, that they will hear Him say: 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'. May they know His peace that passes all understanding, for Jesus' sake we pray. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 22

"The Path To Peace Of Mind - Part 2"

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Philippians 4:6-9

Of course we've been many weeks now, about twenty plus, in our studies on Lord's day mornings in the book of Philippians, which we have called the epistle of joy. Just last week we embarked upon a study of verses 6 and 7, and we called it last week: 'The Path To Peace Of Mind', the path to peace of mind. Really this is part two, as it were, of that series, that title: 'The Path to Peace of Mind - part 2', because in the verses that we'll look at this morning, verses 8 and 9, we have more steps to peace with God in our minds, and to know the peace of God and the God of peace in our hearts with us day by day.

Let's read verses 6, 7, 8 and 9 so that we can get the flow of Paul's thought. Verse 6: "Be careful for nothing", and we saw that that 'be careful' could be translated 'be anxious, or be worried about nothing', "but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you".

Now in verses 6 and 7 we saw how to have the peace of God in you, isn't that right? Verse 7: 'The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus'. How to have the peace of God in you, but now if you look at verses 8 and 9, what Paul is saying here is how to have the God of peace with you. At the end of verse 9: 'and the God of peace shall be with you'. Really it's an extension of more ways that we can know peace of mind and heart with ourselves through knowing God in a personal relationship with Him. I was telling another preacher friend in the week that has gone by what I was preaching on this Sunday, he was asking me what text I was on, and he happened to title these verses: 'The Philippian's Peace Pill' - verses 6 to 9. How to have peace, it's like a little tablet that you can take and the outflow of it will bring the peace of God in your heart, and the God of peace into your life immediately.

Now we saw last week in verses 6 and 7 that that happens when you don't think about negative things. Be careful for nothing, extract negativity from your life - that means anxiety, anxiousness, worry, being over careful for things in your life. Now the way that was done, we found, was: pray about everything, worry about nothing, and be thankful for anything. If you do that, extract negativity from your life of over carefulness and anxiety and unnecessary worry, you will know the experience of the peace of God flooding your heart and mind through Christ Jesus. So last week, if you like, was telling us to extract negative things, not to think about negative things. But now this week we have the antithesis, the opposite of that in verses 8 and 9, and he's now telling us: it's not just enough to take away negative thinking from your life, but you've got to replace it with something, you've got to replace it with positive things.

Now this is more than the power of positive thinking and good psychology, this is something supernatural - because good psychology doesn't give you the peace of God, nor bring you into a relationship with the God of peace and bring Him intimately into your life as a felt reality. Paul is saying: extract the negative things, and bring into your life the positive things, and we're going to see this morning what those positive things are as he lists them to us. But before we go on any further I want you to really grasp this, for this is important if you're ever going to have victory in your life by extracting negative thoughts and bringing into your mind positive

thoughts - this is the thing that you must come to. Now we know, I hope all of us know, that the power of God is essential in your life for Christian growth. We've already found that out in Philippians chapter 2 and verse 13, look at it: 'For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure'.

Now we all believe this, that if we're going to grow and mature in the Christian life in whatever sphere, we're going to need the power of God. We're going to need to know the power of the Holy Spirit to help us, because within ourselves we feel of ourselves that we're not strong enough to accomplish many of the commands and precepts that are given to us in the New Testament. Maybe, as we've been following through these studies on Sunday mornings, you've been listening to the exhortation of the apostle - maybe even last week you've been thinking: 'It's alright David, saying worry about nothing and pray about everything and be thankful for anything, but it's a different thing trying to do it!'. Maybe you were sitting there thinking: 'I just can't do it, no matter how much I try of myself I cannot do it'. Well, here's the first lesson: you cannot do it of yourself, you need God's help, you need God's power in your life.

But you know, I feel for a lot of people that this leaning upon God's power is often just a cop-out. What I mean is: they sit in their anxiety, or they sit in whatever sin they may be resigned to, and they say: 'Well unless God shifts me out of it, unless there's a bolt of supernatural lightning from the Holy Spirit to totally and utterly change me, I will be like this the rest of my life'. That is wrong, because although we need the power of God, if you look at verse 12 just before verse 13 in chapter 2, Paul told the Philippians: 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling'. So there is a responsibility upon you as a Christian to work out your salvation, and that means to actively use your own volition and will to follow the commands of God. The thinking, as we saw a few weeks ago when we looked at this verse in particular, was: God has put His power in you. When you were converted, no matter what the charismatics say, you were given the gift of the Holy Spirit, you were baptised into Christ, you were given all the spiritual gifts necessary in potential within your heart and soul, but it is your duty now - now that you have the power, now that you have the potential - of using your will to work out that power in your life.

Do you see the thinking here? It's no good just saying: 'Well, I don't have enough power. If only God would come into my life in a miraculous way and deliver me from these things!'. Listen: what God is waiting on you doing is working out what He has already worked in. If I could put it like this: the ball is now in your court. The responsibility is with you, don't be waiting for God in some kind of supernatural way to reach out into your life and do something different, because He's done everything that He needs to do and the emphasis now is on you, on you to work out what God has already worked in. All that remains for you to overcome worry, or indeed any problem in your life, is for you, by faith, to utilise the power that God has already infused into your being - and it's all down, and this is what I'm getting to, before we go any further you must get this: this matter of overcoming worry, anxiety, and problems, of extracting the negativity from your life and injecting the positivity, is nothing more than a matter of choice. When you choose to do it.

That is very clear from this text, if you look at chapter 4, our text again, verses 8 and 9: 'Finally, brethren, whatsoever things...', and the list is there, but then at the end, '...think on these things'. It's a command! As another translation puts it will: 'Fix your thoughts, let your mind dwell and ponder on these things' - it's all to do with your will! In verse 9 the same language is used at the end of the verse: 'do', you can't get much clearer than that. Another translation says: 'keep putting into practice, model your way of living on', and Paul gives himself as an example, as he has followed the example of the Lord Jesus. What I want you to see is that all the language in these two verses is the language of volition, the language of will, the language of choice. In other words, it is within your reach, believer, to overcome anxiety and worry and over carefulness. It's there for the taking if you will but reach out by faith! If you do not have it, it is simply a matter of choice.

The reason why I say this and must emphasise that, apart from a complete and universal understanding of what we're going to find in these verses today, I say this because there is a battle on for the mind of believers. I think

that perhaps one of the greatest spiritual supernatural battles that is going on in the unseen world, remember we wrestle not with flesh and blood, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, we wrestle with principalities and powers, and the rulers of this wickedness in heavenly places - but the greatest battle, and the battle I believe that many believers are losing at this present moment, is the battle for the mind. I have said to you before, but it bears repeating and I repeat it so many times in private counselling: that the devil cannot rob you of your salvation - praise God for that, isn't that tremendous to know that today? He cannot take your salvation away, and when you're a Christian soldier, born-again, standing on the victory ground, he cannot effectively take you back into his own camp of the Egyptians. But one thing that the devil can do and is within his power is to rob you of the peace and the joy which is the effulgence of your salvation. In other words, he cannot rob you of your salvation, but he can rob you of the benefits of it.

We're not talking about eternal life and so on, but I'm talking about specifically this peace and joy that Paul has been talking about. Effectively, if he can take the benefits of it away from you, it's as good as taking your salvation - not for eternity, but for the present! It means that you're not living in the reality of your salvation now - and although you'll go to heaven, there's no doubt about that, and you'll be in eternal peace and joy for all of the ages and aeons of limitless timelessness, now what is the effectiveness of your salvation in your life now if that peace and joy has been taken from you? For many Christians the greatest battle in their life is with evil and negative thoughts, even sinful thoughts.

I wonder am I speaking to your heart today? I don't think there's anybody in this meeting exempt from this, I have had this in my life, you have it in your life, if you don't you will have it. We're all in this together today, some more than others. I don't know what that particular problem is in your life, but I know from my own life that it seems to be when you try to address this problem and weed out these thoughts from your life, more thoughts seem to come, and the more you try to put these things right the more wrong they get, and the more you suppress these evil thoughts, it seems that there is a flood of evil that comes into your mind at that moment. It's difficult.

Now for that reason, Paul didn't say: 'Wrestle with those thoughts', do you notice that? Paul didn't tell us to wrestle with those thoughts. Many psychologists today, not that it matters, but they agree that one of the worst things you can do is start to wrestle with evil and negative thoughts, start to try and root them out, you only aggravate them - it's the worst thing you can do. But what Paul is telling us to do after verses 6 and 7 of last week, telling us not to think negatively, is now to think positively. He is saying that you can't just take negative thoughts out of your mind and heart, you've got to cultivate good thoughts, you've got to replace those evil thoughts with something, and those good thoughts will lead to good actions, and ultimately change your mind and heart. That is what the purpose of salvation is - not just to be saved in eternity, but to change the whole man, body, soul and spirit and mind. Remember what Paul said in Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but' - what? - 'be ye transformed by' - what? - 'the renewing of your mind'.

I wonder has your mind been renewed? Sometimes when I talk to young people about evil thoughts and so on I use - and I haven't ever found a better illustration than this, and you have maybe heard me say it before - I use the illustration of a bottle. I ask the question: 'Say you had a milk bottle and it's filled with air, how do you get the air out of the milk bottle?'. You get some hare-brained schemes - get the end of the vacuum cleaner and stick in the nozzle and try to suck it out, put your mouth over it and try to suck it out - but you know the way you get the air out is you pour something else in. You pour water in and the air comes out of it, and really that is the philosophy that was in the mind of the Psalmist in Psalm 119 - and young people, especially young men, grab hold of this and put it in your heart - verse 11: 'Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. How shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word'. Thy word have I put in, that it may put out all evil thoughts and all the negativity.

That's what we're going to be talking about this morning, and there are eight things in these few verses that Paul tells us to pour into your mind so that the negativity may come out. Then in verse 9 he tells us that to think right and to do right, are like a horse and cart, when you start thinking right you'll start doing right - because almost everything in life depends upon your thoughts. Just as the whole forest lies in the little embryo of the acorn, so a good holy life lies in your thoughts. What did the wise man in Proverbs say? 'Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life'. It comes from your thoughts, your imaginations. He also said: 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he'.

So to have the God of peace with you, Paul says, you must do two things: you must think right, and you must do right. Let's deal with the first one, this is probably the most important: to think right. Really what he's saying in verse 8, 'think on these things', is that spiritual stability is a result of how a person thinks. Proverbs said: 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he', and the word here 'think on these things' could be translated 'dwell on', and the Greek is in the sense of a command - think on these things! It's a choice, and it's more than just entertaining these thoughts, it's stronger than that - the word means 'to evaluate', to sit down and really consider and calculate these things, and to work them out in your mind, to spend time. The verb is in a certain form that insinuates an habitual discipline of mind, where you set your thoughts on spiritual virtues.

Of course who of us doesn't think about spiritual things now and again. Maybe you're sitting here and spiritual thoughts are coming, I hope they are coming to your mind as we study the word of God. But that's no big thing, is it? When you're in church, spiritual thoughts coming; or even when you're reading the Bible - but what this is talking about is a discipline whereby each day you choose in your mind to think upon spiritual things as opposed to thinking about sinful things and worthless things. The importance of doing this is because you will imbibe and inwardly digest those thoughts, and they will determine the type of person that you will become.

'You are what you think', one man said, 'not what you think you are'. Many people think themselves to be something, but they're nothing - and if we could see into your thought life, and you could see into mine, we would really be able to see the measure of a man and a woman by what we think about. I'm not very computer literate, but I hear that there is an acronym in the jargon of computer buffs and it's 'GIGO', and it simply means 'garbage in, garbage out'. If you put garbage into a computer you will get garbage out, the output is dependent upon the information that is input, and it's the same with people's actions. What you think about will be put out in your actions, and indeed your actions will be determined by the thought life that you have.

Do you remember in Mark's gospel chapter 7, the Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples: 'That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man'. Although He said it's not what you put in, in the sense of food and drink, that defiles a man; ultimately in His thinking and philosophy it is that what comes out is what has already been put in in the thought life. You know that in the Sermon on the Mount He told us that to hate a person is the same as murder, and to lust after a woman in your mind and with your eyes and your heart is the same as adultery - because ultimately that is the seed of thought that will lead to the very action.

Now let's really get to the crux of what he's telling us to do when we're told the thing. If you turn to Matthew's gospel chapter 6, you're at the Sermon on the Mount, that we studied not so long ago. We don't have time to read the whole portion I want us to look at, but there's just a few words that are so important, verse 25 of Matthew 6: 'Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought', that's the same phrase, you remember, as 'be careful for nothing' in Philippians chapter 4, 'take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold', that means 'look', 'Behold the fowls of the air'. Then in verse 27: 'And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider',

behold, look at, think about, 'the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin'. Verse 31: 'Therefore take no thought'. Verse 34: 'Take no thought'.

So you see that the thinking of the Lord Jesus is: 'Don't think about bad things, negative things, but think about good things - that is, there's the lilies of the field. Look at how beautiful they are, they're greater than Solomon in all his glory and your heavenly Father cares for them. Look at the sparrows in the sky, they don't need to beg for their food, or go out and work for their food, your heavenly Father loves them - how much more are ye than sparrows?'. You see what He's asking them to do, He's asking them to stop thinking negatively and start thinking positively, to think in reality and in truth. Listen to what Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones says about that particular passage, and I think he sums it all up for us: 'Faith, according to our Lord's teaching in this paragraph, is primarily thinking'. He's saying faith is thinking. 'And the whole trouble with a man of little faith is that he does not think. He allows circumstances to bludgeon him. That is the real difficulty in life, life comes to us with a club in its hand and strikes us upon the head, and we become incapable of thought, helpless and defeated. The way to avoid that, according to our Lord, is to think. We must spend more time in studying our Lord's lessons, in observation and deduction. Look at the birds, think about them, and draw your deductions. Look at the grass, look at the lilies of the field, consider them. The trouble with most people, however, is that they will not. Instead of doing this, they sit down and ask: 'What is going to happen to me? What can I do?'. That is the absence of thought, it is surrender, it is defeat. Our Lord here is urging us to think and to think in a Christian manner, and that is the very essence of faith. Faith, if you like, can be defined like this: it is a man insisting upon thinking when everything seems determined to bludgeon and knock him down in an intellectual sense. The trouble with the person of little faith is that instead of controlling his own thought, his thought is being controlled by something else - and, as we put it, he goes round and round in circles - that is the essence of worry, that is not thought, that is the absence of thought, the failure to think'.

Isn't that true? Think about the sparrow, just for a moment. Now I don't know just how much a loaf of bread was in the Lord Jesus' day, I'm sure we could find out, but I know how much inflation is going up in our day, and I can imagine without any calculation in exactitude how much inflation has gone up on a loaf of bread since Jesus' day to our day - yet isn't it amazing that the little sparrow, when you look out your window into the garden, still struggles with the big crust! It makes you think, doesn't it?

Paul is just saying what Jesus said: 'Think on these things'. Look to Luke 12 for a moment, because it's the same thought, Luke 12 verse 29, and here's a part that we don't usually meditate on. He's talking about clothing the grass, and in verse 29 He says: 'And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink', and here's a wee phrase that is tremendous, 'neither be ye of doubtful mind'. Look at the margin if you have a good margin Bible, the margin rendering says: 'Live not in careful suspense'. If you're thinking right, you will not live in careful suspense, in a continual atmosphere of fright and fretfulness and anxiety. Now the question here we're asking, and need to ask ourselves is: do we consider and think upon God's truth, or do we consider and think and imbibe on the devil's lies? I believe that the devil, now listen, this is one of the most potent Satanic plans and schemes of the 21st century, and it always has been with the people of God, it is to win the minds of believers and to bind them and paralyse them by anxiousness. But Jesus said: 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall' - do what? Make you free!

I have had this experience in my own life, to be made free from anxious thoughts by the Lord Jesus Christ and His truth. Don't for one minute think that faith is a leap in the dark, it is not! Faith is based on facts, God's facts, and that faith comes when you start to think upon those facts and believe them - because faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Now what are the practicalities of this? Let me make it as practical to you as I can: thinking upon these things doesn't come naturally. What I mean is, when you wake up in the morning good thoughts are not going to naturally immediately come into your mind - you must, here's our point again, determine to do it! You must make the choice of thinking about good things. Now when you get up in the morning, your mind is like a fertile field, it's pure black in its soil and its purity. Now, you see when you get up,

if you don't start to plant good thoughts, good seed in the soil, before lunchtime that field will be full of weeds! But if you make the right choice when you get up in the morning and you start to put the good seed of the word of God in that field, by lunchtime there will be a harvest of good thoughts and there'll be no room for any weeds whatsoever!

That's one of the reasons why I believe it is more necessary and desirable that you read the Scriptures and study and meditate upon them and pray in the morning, rather than the evening. Let's spend just one moment on the psychology of this thinking. Remember the Lord Jesus when He was teaching in the Gospels, He used to say: 'Let this sink down deep into your ears'. Do you ever wonder what that meant? 'Let it sink down deep into your ears'. Well, when you think about this, the Lord Jesus is the Creator of the universe. He created you, He created your ears, and He also created your whole being so that He knows that you've got what is called a consciousness, and an unconsciousness. The consciousness is the thing that you think with, the things that you're aware of; and your unconsciousness is the things that you imbibe and you're not aware of, but makes up your being, your inner man. Now Jesus and Paul are teaching us to sow good thoughts in your consciousness, plant good seed in your consciousness, and what will happen is that will sink down deep into your ears, into your subconsciousness - and eventually after a period of time, a season, that subconsciousness will bring forth a harvest of well-being in your heart.

Do you see it? But what do you think happens if you sow sinful thoughts, depressive thoughts, careful thoughts, over careful thoughts, anxious thoughts - it will breed depressiveness in your subconscious. You wonder why you're down in the dumps, why everything seems to be against you, and why you feel like you maybe don't even want to go on living - because the fruit that is being brought forth has been put in by the thoughts of negativity that you have allowed and even planted in your own heart!

Let me get even more practical: here's the ramifications of this psychology of this teaching of Paul and Jesus - do you think these kinds of thoughts and harvest will come from watching television? I'm not saying it's wrong to watch the television, don't misunderstand me, don't go away and misquote me - but do you think imbibing the soaps, the philosophies, the morals, the values of the world on a continual 7, or 6, or 5 night a week basis will bring forth this type of harvest in your life? Do you think filling your heart and mind with all the depressive news through all the newspapers, I'm not against reading them, it's important that you read certain newspapers and not others - and it surprises me at times what some of the children of God read! But even filling your heart and mind with the crime and the rape and the pillage and the old people that are being mugged and all the rest, continually dwelling upon these things. Going to the cinema, watching films that are anti-God, that have no thought of God, filled with bad language, imbibing this in your mind - and then when you hit your thumb with a hammer, what's the first thought that comes to you? Filling your heart and mind and melody with pop music and the philosophies of godless, immoral and amoral men! Will this bring forth a harvest unto good or a harvest unto evil?

I think when you consider how much time we give to these things, is it any wonder that we're reaping a harvest of depression in this day and age in which we live? Especially if you give your mind to nothing but feeding upon worry, anxiety, and what can go wrong - you will know this in your heart as a fruit of dejection. Someone has well said: 'Fear is the darkroom where many negatives are developed'. Now remember it's not just about subtraction, it's about subtraction by addition, you have to not just stop thinking wrong thoughts, but start thinking right thoughts. You've got to pour in the positives to push out the negatives.

Here's what they are, we don't have time to look at them in detail, you can do that. He says: 'Think on whatever is true', that means whatever is real, not just true, but whatever is real - reality in God's terms. You can do that only when you meditate upon the word of God. So many times I'm talking to people, and they're downcast in their Christian life, and they're backslidden - one of the questions I've learnt time after time to ask is: 'Are you reading your Bible?' - and most of them aren't! True, honest, noble things, worthy things of respect, honourable things - not trivial, temporal, mundane, common earthly things, but things that are worth praise and adoration.

Just, that means righteousness, whatever is in perfect harmony with God's eternal unchanging standards. You can find that only in the Scriptures, reading the Scriptures. Whatever is pure, whatever is morally clean, undefiled. Bishop Lightfoot translates it 'stainless' - and you know as well as I do that there are certain things, when you put them into your mind, it's hard rubbing the stain off. The way that men morally collapse is that they imbibe in their inner thought life some evil, and they harbour it, that impure thought - and it destroys their moral defences of mind, and when the temptation to do the actual thing comes along they meet it and they fall. Whatsoever is lovely, wholly admirable, having an innate beauty all of its own. Things that are consistent with passages like 1 Corinthians 13 about love, it means things that are sweet, generous, patient. Then he goes on 'of good report' - that means winsome, something that's attractive. Do you think about attractive things or depressive things? Things that are highly regarded by men and by God. Virtue is another thing he says, and Guy King the commentator says it could be translated, he believes 'by consistency'. Do you apply the same rules to others as yourselves in your thought life? Or are you inconsistent?

Things that are praiseworthy, he says, primarily things that God estimates as good things to think about. Paul says to pour these in, all these things in your mind, and they will push out all the negative things, they will be like soldiers standing at the gateway of your soul to challenge anything and everything that appears that is wrong and ungodly. They're like angels that penetrate your heart and root out all the intruders, the evil residents that will pull you down and destroy your heart. Martin Luther was right when he said: 'You can't prevent a bird flying over your head, but you can prevent it making a nest in your hair'. Evil thoughts come to us all, don't they? Sometimes it's like walking down a street, like Thorndyke Street, and everybody has their windows open and they're all shouting at you for attention, and you're just trying to walk to the end of the street. All those evil thoughts and everything, and it just takes all in your power almost to get to the end of the road without stopping and turning and taking your attention away from the things of God.

You might say, 'But David, what about when I'm down praying on my knees, or I'm at the Lord's Table, or I'm in church, and some of the worst imaginable thoughts come into my mind?' - the answer is: pour in good thoughts! Paul would say in another place: 'Act as a police man' - 2 Corinthians 10:5 - 'Bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ'. Do you know what a police man does when he sees a burglar unlawfully trying to enter a house? He goes over and arrests that person in the name of the law and the state! Paul is saying that whenever those unlawful things spring into your mind from Satanic sources - and that's where they're from, as long as you haven't committed them all, those things that come out of the blue, if you arrest them in the name of the King of kings, and pour in good thoughts you will be delivered.

Can I beg of you: whatever you do, don't let your thoughts go unnoticed. I imagine, and I think it's remarkable, that so many Christians have a thought life like a sewer - and their lives are starting to smell! It's remarkable in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, he talks about a man called Ignorance, and the description of him was as he walked beside the two elder pilgrims going to glory, that Ignorance says to them: 'My heart is as good as the next man's', and then he adds, 'As to my thoughts, I take no notice of them'. How many are like that? Listen to what F. B. Meyer says about that: 'Those people leave the Castlegate of their soul perfectly open for any intruder that may wish to enter either from heaven or hell, and so it befalls that the thoughts of the world, of vanity, of impurity; thoughts which are inspired by demons, but which are arrayed in the garb of respectable citizens, pour into the great gateway of the soul, filling the courtyard with their tumultuous uproar. Without discrimination, thought or care on their part, they allow themselves to be occupied and possessed with thoughts of which they have every reason to be ashamed, and they teem in and out and do just as they will - and this is the reason why you sometimes find your heart filled with passion, it is because Guy Fawkes has entered in disguise with his fellow conspirators, and under long flowing robes have introduced explosives'.

I remember going to school during the troubles in the centre of town - you remember too, don't you? On the bus you weren't able to get down Donegal Place on the bus until a man or a woman got on there at Robinson

Cleavers, where it used to be, and searched the whole bus for a bomb. You weren't allowed into the citadel of the city without that search, into the supermarkets, into the superstores - they stopped you, and that's what you've got to do with your mind! Stop your thoughts, search your thoughts, and only let them come in when they are pure and when they have all these qualifications that Paul speaks of.

I wonder is there somebody saying: 'Well, that's alright - it's alright for you to say all that, but that's too high a goal for me'. My friend, listen to me, and let this penetrate your heart today: all of these attributes, everything that you see before your eyes on this page, they have all been won for you by Jesus Christ. All of them! They were native to Him in His life, He won them also because He pursued them throughout His temptation and His earthly journey. He kept them as His own, face-to-face with the most terrible and terrific temptations that any human being has ever faced - He endured them all, and then He died, then He rose again, then He ascended to the right hand of God as a human being who eternally and inherently can give to those who, by faith, through His Spirit, ask Him for that same power. It's attainable by faith. If you think right, and you do right - and we haven't got time to look at the doing right, but let me just say this: your thinking will determine your action, and it cannot be divorced from your action. Your character will take on the complexion of your thoughts. If you cherish noble thoughts you will become noble, if you cherish evil thoughts you will become evil, and all the rest - and you know as well as I do that when you consider things in your mind over and over again it becomes comparatively easy to do it if you're presented with the opportunity.

What's a summary of everything that we've just read last week and this week? It's simply this, especially this week: what you do when you rise from your knees is as important as what you say when you're on your knees. It's not just about praying, it's about the way you think, and it's about how your thinking determines your actions. When you think on these things, when you're anxious for nothing, you pray about everything, and are thankful for anything, and when you think on these things and do the will of God: God will be with you. He was right when he said: 'Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny'. Where is your destiny? Where is your joy?

Our Father, we thank Thee for Thy practical instruction to us. We pray that everyone whose heart is wrecked with fear and anxiety may know this very day, in fact this moment by a choice of faith upon the authority of Thy word, the peace flooding their heart which is beyond comprehension. Give it to them now, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 23

"The Secret Of Contentment"

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by Pastor David Legge
Philippians 4:10-13

Turn with me to Philippians 4, and I want to speak to you this morning on the secret of contentment. The last two studies on Lord's Day mornings have been looking at the path to peace of mind, and we saw in that first study that the way to the path of peace of mind and heart was to be anxious for nothing, in other words to subtract the negative things in your thinking, and to turn those negative things into prayers. We saw in our outline that particular Lord's Day that we were to be worried, or anxious, or over-careful about nothing, to pray about everything, and to be thankful for anything. Then last Lord's Day, the second part of that study 'The Path to Peace of Mind', we saw that not only could the peace of God be known to us, but the God of peace could be with us by not only subtracting the negative things in our thought processes and turning them into prayers, but learning the discipline of thinking upon positive things, godly things. Verse 8 really outlined that for us: 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things'. We saw in verse 9 that it's not just to think about the right things, but thinking about right things will determine doing right things in our life. What we think about, we will become - what we think we are, the proverb says, and that's so true. Depending on what our thought pattern is, that will determine what our actions will be - when we sow a thought we will reap an action.

Now this week it's related, you couldn't fail to see how it is related, but it's almost an analysis or an amplification of this peace of mind, this joy of heart that can be ours - and Paul encapsulates it within the thought of contentment, what it is to be content in our lives down here on earth. So we're looking at the secret of contentment from verses 10 to 13. Let's just read them again: "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me".

One day Lord Condleton (sp?), a godly man, overheard his Christian servants remarking in the kitchen: 'Oh, if I only had five pounds I would be perfectly content'. Pondering her statement he decided that he would like to see someone who was perfectly content, so he went to the woman and said that he had overheard what she'd said in the kitchen, and he wanted to do something about it. So he proceeded to reach into his pocket and lift out a five pound note and gave it to her, for which she thanked him very gratefully. Condleton went out the door of the kitchen, and for a moment he paused at the door unknown to her, and as soon as the woman thought he had gone she began to complain: 'Why on earth didn't I ask for 10 pounds?'.

Now is that not the spirit that we live in today in our world and in our age? It is a spirit that lacks contentment, the spirit that never ever is satisfied - and even when it gets what it wants, it then wants more. It is a highly prized thing to be contented in our world, but it seems that it's a very elusive virtue. Everybody wants it, everybody strives toward it, everybody thinks they know how to get it, but nobody ever reaches the goal of perfect contentment. Probably the reason for that is that they seek that contentment in the wrong places, and we don't need to look too far to see men and women trying to find contentment in money and possessions and power, prestige and their relationships with one another, and even in the attempt to be free from all difficulties and problems and strains and stresses. Now if those things were the places where contentment could be found, that would be great: but the fact of the matter is, because we live in a fallen world you can never have enough

money, you can never have enough possessions or power or prestige, you can never have the perfect relationship, and you can never ever be free from difficulties. Therefore, if that is what contentment is, contentment is unattainable. It cannot be had if it is to be found in those things.

So what is contentment? When we talk as Christians about this, what is the definition that we have of contentment? Now we're going to spend time outlining all of this and teasing out this definition that Paul gives us here, but just to get a little quip, one sentence of a definition of what contentment is, we can do no better than to look to Jeremiah Burroughs, who was a puritan who wrote that famous book: 'The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment'. He said within that volume, listen: 'Christian contentment is that sweet inward quiet, that gracious frame of spirit which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition'. Let me read that to you again: 'Christian contentment is that sweet inward quiet, that gracious frame of spirit which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition'.

Now let me say just for a moment what this contentment is not. Sometimes I hear people ignorantly saying: 'Well, Paul tells us that we are to be content in whatever circumstances we find ourselves in', and they apply this to their spiritual condition. 'I am what I am, I try my best, I can't do any more, I've made a few mistakes in my time - but here I am, and I'm content with what I am as a Christian. I'm not to get too uptight about how spiritual I am or am not' - that is not what Paul is talking about when he says that he is content and we ought to be content also. His contentment was certainly not complacency with himself. To believe that you would have to believe he was contradicting himself in what he says in chapter 4 from what he said in chapter 3. Was it not he who said that he hadn't already attained unto that for which Christ had apprehended him for? He hadn't fulfilled the full potential of all that Christ had bought for him at Calvary's cross, and so he says: 'I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, that I may attain unto the resurrection of the dead'. He felt that he hadn't got there, and he wasn't content until he was serving the Lord and worshipping the Lord in spiritual attainment, that which came to the mark of Christ Himself.

So if you like, looking up into the face of the Lord Jesus, seeing the Saviour in all of His perfection and in all that He won for him at Calvary, he wasn't content until he achieved that prize and got to glory and had finished the race. But as he took his eyes off heaven and looked down onto earth into all of his circumstances, he looked at the prison bars on the window of the house - he was under house arrest then - he looked at the jailer that was beside him, shackled to him by handcuffs, he was able to say: 'I am content with the lot that God has given to me, I am absolutely satisfied'. I hope you can see the distinction. James McIntosh put like this: 'It is right to be contented with what we have, never with what we are'. So you see the difference, we're not talking about our spiritual development and maturity, we're not to get anxious about it to such an extent that we make ourselves sick, we're just to do what we ought to do and what we are commanded to do in the power of Christ. But what Paul is talking about here is his circumstances and his supplies, his resources in life.

Now the Bible has much to say about contentment, and we wouldn't have a hope of getting through it all this morning - but what I do want to say, if we could sum it all up, we see that contentment, just like joy and peace, and the fullness of the Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit within the scripture, contentment is given to us in the final analysis as a command. Something we ought to be, not something that comes through a kind of supernatural charismatic revelation to us when we're struck down by some kind of divine lightning - nothing like that! It is a command, because we have had given to us as a deposit potentially within our soul, as we saw last week, God has worked into us His salvation and everything that we need. We ought to therefore work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and we are commanded in this life to be joyous, to be at peace, and to be content.

Now for ten years, we are led to believe, the Philippian church had been unable to send material resources and aid to its beloved founder, Paul the apostle. That's why he says in verse 10: 'I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again'. They were able now, in this verse, to give him some

financial resources - but for ten years or so they hadn't been able to do so. Now Paul tells us very clearly: 'wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity', in other words, it wasn't that you didn't care about me any more that you didn't send the help, but you just didn't have the opportunity to do it. It may be that they didn't have the financial resources to do it, they were so poor that they had nothing to give whatsoever. But Paul is rejoicing now that they've been given a new opportunity by God to give him resources, and to help him even here in the prison in Rome. But even though he had been so many years without their financial help, and even though that financial help had been known to him in miraculous ways throughout the Acts of the Apostles, and now has been revived, the word is, again to him; he wants them not to be under any illusion that he is dependent upon their help in anyway.

Now it's very important that you understand where Paul is coming from here, he wants them to know very definitely that he never ever was in personal want in all of the decade that they never lifted a hand to help him, even though they couldn't. The reason why he was never in want was not because he didn't need anything, or he could have been doing with anything, but because he had found within his inner man the secret of contentment. He could say, like David, 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want' - or as another translation says: 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing'.

What is the secret to contentment? Well, it's found in these three things that I'm going to share with you from this passage. The first is this: the secret to contentment is found in the stillness and the stability of contentment, the stillness and the stability of contentment. In other words, a contented person is a person that is confident in God, and still knowing that God is God. We sang it, didn't we, at the beginning of our meeting: 'Be still and know that I am God'. So we could put like this: a contented person is a person who is still and stable and confident in the providential dealings of God. God's providence, how God leads and plans and guides and protects. Now we've already said that the Philippian believers had generously supported the apostle when he left Philippi to minister in the Macedonian cities of Thessalonica and Berea. You can read about that in Acts chapter 17. Then when Paul moved south to Achaia, they continued to support him as he ministered in Athens and Corinth - but when that support stopped, and the support was essential and needed at the time, when it stopped Paul's attitude didn't change at all, his boat wasn't rocked, his inner peace didn't deplete into a ravenous storm!

Paul's attitude when it stopped reflected his patient confidence in God's sovereignty and God's providence as an Almighty, all-powerful, omnipotent God in his life. He was certain that sometime, in some place, through some circumstances, God would arrange his circumstances to meet his needs. In other words, he didn't panic, he didn't go berserk, the bottom didn't fall out of his world! He didn't take matters into his own hands, he didn't manipulate other people to get what he wanted or to get what he felt that he needed, but he was content because he knew that in his life God doesn't just - as Mueller said - order the steps of a righteous man, but God also orders the stops of a righteous man too.

God knew and had communicated to Paul that his times and seasons, opportunities of life, were all controlled by Him, that God who works all things together according to the counsel of His divine will, the God who exercises this and engages this counsel to such an extent in the life of the believer that Paul could say that he knew therefore that all things work together for good to them that love God, to those that were the called according to His purpose. Now believing friends today, let us not give lip service to these promises of Scripture that we quote so freely and magnificently in the prayer meetings and from the pulpits. Do we believe these words? Do we believe these verses and texts and promises? Do we have a confident, constant, unshaken, still and stable faith in the providence of God? Because that is foundational to this type of contentment.

You need to believe that God is in control, you need to have that stillness, that stability that is not rocked when the resources that supply your need are stopped - because you believe that God has oversaw that, and God is in it, and God will weave the ways of your life round it. Providence and miracle are two ways in which God works and leads and acts in this world. A miracle is something that is unnatural, it's against the laws of this universe in

a sense, and there are no reasonable rational explanations to it - and praise God, some of us still believe in miracles. But then there is providence, and that is God using the natural means, the normal elements in life - it is supernatural, yes, but it is supernatural in the sense that God weaves together all these natural and normal things to fit into His perfect plan exactly - everything! You could read about it in Proverbs 16 verse 9, where the wise man said: 'A man's heart', or a man's mind, 'deviseth his ways: but the LORD directeth his steps'. In other words, every day you can't always be seeking God to give us our need and to lead us and direct us, but when you come to a road and you want to go left or go right you can't always get on your knees and pray and ask God's guidance - there are many decisions in life that we take, and we hope that because we're in communion with God, walking in fellowship with Him, and there's no sin between us and God, that God will order our steps, and in the big picture that it will all weave together according to His will. That's His providence.

Sometimes He stops us in our tracks, like Paul going into Berea. Other times He opens up a door that seems to be impossible, and He works a miracle and we go across the Red Sea, and all the natural laws of man's thinking are stopped and we move into the supernatural, into the miraculous. But every day working of God often is in this providence where, if we could see the panoramic view, we could see God's Holy Spirit weaving together all the mundane and seemingly insignificant events and elements of life for His purpose and His will. Now we don't have time to look at biblical characters today, but one man whom you can see this in in the Old Testament surely is the patriarch Joseph. Can you not see him? God obviously appoints him to arise to the position of leadership in the land of Egypt, and the purpose of which that has been called for is to preserve many people alive, and eventually deliver the people of Israel and preserve the Messianic seed - but you say: 'But how can that be in God's will? Sure, wasn't he despised by his brethren? Wasn't he thrown down the pit? Wasn't he sold into slavery? Wasn't he forgotten by the jailer, by the butler and the baker and all the rest of them? Wasn't he in Potiphar's house and sinned against by his wife?'. You could go through all those things and say: 'Where is God providence in that?', yet at the end of Joseph's life he turns to the brothers who betrayed him, and he says: 'But as for you, you thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good to bring to pass as it is this day to save much people alive'.

Now listen, the first secret to contentment is a firm, still, unshakable dependence upon the providence of God in your life - being in God's will, and when you're in it believing you're in it. I love the writings of F. B. Meyer, listen to what he says about what it is like being in the will of God and knowing it, no matter what happens: 'All is of God, and God is good. Every wind blows from the quarter of His love, every storm wafts us nearer the harbour, every cup - though presented by the hand of Judas - is mixed by the Father of our spirits. It is not possible for a man to be thrust by his brethren into the pit unless God permit it, and therefore we may say with Joseph: 'It was not you that sent me hither, but God'. Habituate yourself, oh Christian soul, to believe that not only what God appoints, but what He permits is in the sphere of His will. It is His will for you to be full today and to be empty tomorrow, to abound today or to be abased tomorrow' - this is wonderful - 'He has a reason, though He may not tell it to you, and because you know that the reason satisfies Him, you may be content!'. Because you know that the reason satisfies Him, you can be content.

That is a stillness and stability in contentment, then the second secret is found in the sphere and the scope of contentment, the sphere and the scope. He says in verse 10: 'wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want', not that I lacked anything, 'for I have learned', verse 11, 'in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need'. A contented person, Paul is saying from his own experience, is a person that's satisfied with both little and much in life. If I could boil it down to two things: he is satisfied whatever his circumstances, and he is satisfied whatever the supplies in his circumstances. Throughout them all, whatever they are, he has this peace, this transcendent joy that is unshakable and unaffected by his circumstances and by his supplies, whether the lavishing of them or the lack of them.

Let's look at the first: whatever his circumstances. Verse 11: 'For I have learned, in whatever state', some translations say circumstances, 'I am, therewith to be content'. 'I have learned' - do you see this? This is something of his will, this wasn't something that he sat down and received as a theory in an academic Bible College or classroom, but it was found and learned in the school of life. He learned it at Jerusalem by the things that he had suffered that the Lord had told them he would suffer. He had learned about it in Arabia in those years seeking God's face and having those revelations, the mysteries that were not revealed through all time that we have in our New Testament. He learned it at Lystra and Derby and Antioch and Ephesus where he was persecuted, and now in a prison in Rome he's still learning in his circumstances how to be content.

Do you remember what it said of our Lord in the book of Hebrews? He learned obedience by the things that He suffered - our Lord! It doesn't mean that He was sinful in any shape or form, He could do no sin, neither was sin or guile found in His mouth - but what it is telling us is that in His humanity He suffered, but that suffering brought forth the fruit, the wonderful fruit of continual obedience to God so that He could say: 'I will do the will of my Father who has sent me', and He set His face as a flint to go to Jerusalem. Even in that type of suffering and circumstances, reminiscent of His Saviour, Paul could say: 'I'm content, and I have learned contentment through that type of suffering circumstance'.

I wonder do we learn anything from our suffering circumstances? Some of us might learn how to moan more, how to be pitied more, pampered more - where do we learn how to suffer more with contentment, with this stillness and stability in our lives? Paul says: 'Whether I live in fullness or emptiness, whether I experience pain or pleasure', and he had experienced both, 'whether', and this was common language and illustration in Paul's day, 'whether the river is running low, being abased, or whether it's running at floodtide, bank to bank, and abounding. Whatever my life is bringing to me I am content - I've learned it, I wasn't always like that, but I've learned that that's how to cope'. He knew life in every extreme, when the river was low, its resources were a bare trickle over its pebbly bed; when they were high, running over, and everything looked promising. In the comfort of the home of Priscilla and Aquila, or in the prison here in Rome - whether he had a pillow of down to put his head on, or a pillow of stone; whether he had carpet or a damp cell floor - whatever it was, Paul had learned this in plenty, in poverty, in sickness, in health, in joy and sorrow, in weakness and strength, evil report, good report. In all these extremes he had learned, and he says: 'I was instructed in the art of contentment through the varied and many experiences of my life'.

What's he saying? Well, I think one thing he's saying is: contentment comes not because we have conquered our circumstances, or we have learned how to change our circumstances, but we have learned how to live with our circumstances. A man on one occasion was justifiably proud about his garden, until one year he found a heavy crop of dandelions appearing all over the lawn. He tried everything he had ever heard of for getting rid of them but without any success. At last he wrote to a school of agriculture giving a list of the remedies he had tried, and he ended with this appeal: 'What shall I do now?'. In due course the reply came: 'We suggest that you learn to love them'. I'm not suggesting that you love maybe what's happening to you, I'm not suggesting that you even embrace it in love, but there is a joy and contentment that transcends life's circumstances to the extent that you can learn to live with the peace of God in your heart through these circumstances.

Whatever his circumstances, then he says 'whatever his supplies'. Whether his resources are abating or abounding, whatever they may be doing he rejoiced, and he was content. The reason why material things can never make a man content is because he's never able to get enough of them to satisfy his need and, really, his greed. John D. Rockefeller, the great multimillionaire, was asked how much money would be enough to him. He thought for a moment, and then he said: 'Just a little more than one has'. Isn't that it? Just a little more than one has - and the world's wealthiest man has yet to say: 'I have enough to be satisfied'.

Now here's the crux of a matter, what Paul has been leading up to, talking about these circumstances and supplies. He's saying: 'If you want to be a man or a woman who is happy don't look for more possessions. If you

want to make a man happy don't give him possessions, take away his desires!'. What are your desires? This isn't a matter of possessions, or what you have, or what you can achieve, it's a matter of desire. Augustine put it like this: 'One man may have much money on him, but no greed in him; whereas another man may have no money on him, but much greed in him'. It's nothing to do with the possessions that you have, it's whether these possessions have you! Contentment means that whatever we do not have we do not need, contentment doesn't depend on what you have or where you are, but it depends primarily on who you are and who you're in. It's not an economic quality, it is a spiritual attainment, and when we read in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 - we haven't time to do it - all that Paul suffered in his missionary journeys and in his Christian life, to think at the end of it all, with constant sufferings, he learned the secret of rising above them and being content, it's amazing!

In fact, before in chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians verse 17, he says: 'For our momentary light affliction, is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison'. He couldn't fail to be content with a perspective like that, could he? Now let me remind you for a moment that Saul of Tarsus knew what it was to be wealthy - I believe he came from a wealthy background. He was educated at the feet of Gamaliel, he was a Jew of the Jews, and in fact he says in Galatians that his position as a Jew in Israel brought great monetary rewards - so much so that he excelled in his religion far above anybody of his own age. We know from historical records that when you were a Pharisee of that kind it brought great monetary rewards to you. When he said in Galatians that he profited in the Jewish religion above many my equals in mine own nation, he was talking about religious esteem - but we could equally say that He profited financially from it. Affluence was the station of his life, yet when we come to Philippians chapter 3 and verses 7 and 8, what did he say? 'But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ'. That is the testimony of a satisfied man, that is the witness of a man who is happy.

We could say the opposite to what we've already said, which I suppose is like this: believer and unbeliever, if you're not satisfied with Christ, you'll never be satisfied with anything. The first secret is the stillness and stability of contentment, the second is sphere and scope no matter what's going on in your circumstances and with your supplies; and thirdly: the source and supply of contentment. As we go, and we have gone, through Philippians these weeks - it's not too hard to find the secret of Paul's contentment, is it? Chapter 1 verse 21: 'For to me to live is Christ' - you remember we paraphrased that: 'As far as I'm concerned, Jesus Christ is the sum total of my life. For me, Jesus Christ is the foundation of my life, Jesus Christ is the goal of life, Jesus Christ is the fullness of life, Jesus Christ is life'. In chapter 2 what's he saying? In humility we need to have the mind of Christ. In chapter 3 what's he been saying? 'That I might know Christ, that I might fellowship in His sufferings, that I might be made conformed to His death, that I might win Christ, that I may be found in Christ'. And now he says in this chapter, verse 13 - how can I live in contentment? Three guesses at the answer: 'I can do all things', or could be translated 'I can do anything God asks me to do, be anywhere God wants me to be through Christ who strengthens me'.

He is the source and supply of contentment. Listen to what Jeremiah Burroughs says in his book: 'Contentment is realising that God has already provided everything we need for our greatest happiness!' It's all there! Where? Christ! Yet many of God's children have not learned this secret of contentment, they haven't learned what Jesus said: 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth'. He came alongside a woman at a well who was wrecked, her soul was thirsty, and He said to her: 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whosoever drinketh of the water of life freely that I shall give shall never thirst. The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life'. A paraphrase: 'In these material things is no lasting satisfaction, only in that which I provide can there be found satisfaction and contentment!'.

Paul had drunk deep in the wells of this life, but he found the greatest contentment and satisfaction with Jesus - so much so that he would rather go hungry with Jesus than ever be found at a banquet table with any wealthy

man. Child of God, is there restlessness in your heart? Do you long for that peace, that joy that cannot be found in career, materials, holidays, prestige, religion? Do you long to have that satisfaction and contentment which Paul testifies he found? I can say to you on the authority of God's word: it is only to be found in Christ, a saved life in Christ, a life centred around the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ must be your goal, He must be the fullness of your life, He must be all in all, and you must turn to Him for Him to complement your need, whatever that need may be - and He, praise God, has been found to be by Paul and every saint of God that has turned to Him, to be sufficient for every need that you have. The greater your lack is: to them that have no might, He increases strength.

One put it like this beautifully: 'To the ignorant He is wisdom; to the unholy, sanctification; to the enslaved He is redemption. His miracles manifested the supply of His royal nature to the need around Him. His purity cleansed the polluted flesh of the leper. His life poured into the arteries of death. His strength made good the helplessness of the paralysed - receive from Christ grace upon grace, and look upon the emptiness and need of your spirit as the greater reason why you should claim all from Him'.

Not only can we do all things through Him, but there's not really an option: we must do all through His strength. Most of you are familiar with Isaiah 40 verse 31 which says: 'They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength' - well the margin in the Authorised Version has this alternative rendering: 'They that wait upon the LORD shall change their strength'. Moses thought he could get out of Egypt into the promised land and save his brethren with a clenched mailed fist, but it was God who taught him that he would have to drink and get strength from the divine supernatural water from the rock. Peter, with his big mouth, his verbose claims, thought he could be held in great esteem with the Son of God, and even stand at His right hand one day - but he found at Pentecost that it was only through the anointing of the Holy Ghost, that still small Spirit, that he could be bold as a lion.

Paul no longer speaks of his pharisaic ancestry, and all the qualities which he had counted so much gain, but he's content to be weak, to be naked, to be stripped, to be starving, to be the offscouring and despised of all things, that he might depend upon the power of God. Can you depend upon it? I don't seek to underestimate what you're going through, or what your need is, or what your circumstances are: but take the word of God for it, you can do anything, you can experience anything through Christ who is that dynamite strength of God.

Oh, we thank Thee Lord Jesus that Thy riches are so vast; that whatever we are called to go through in this life, that we may follow Thee through the wilderness. We remember that Thou wast led up to the wilderness by the Spirit of God to be tempted of the devil, and we know that God never tempts anyone with evil, but we also believe that Thou art guiding us, holy Saviour, through this pilgrimage - and whatever steps we may falter, whatever path we may tread, whatever tunnel we may pass through, we thank Thee, Saviour, Redeemer, that Thou art able to take us through, to sustain us, to keep us and to present us spotless before the throne of Thy Father with great joy. Lord, may every heart and soul and mind and body find Thee sufficient for their need now and forever, Amen.

Philippians: Epistle Of Joy - Chapter 24

"The Conditions and Confidence of God's Provision For Us"

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Philippians 4:14-23

I'm taking up this final study in Philippians under the title 'The Conditions and Confidence of God's Provision For Us' as believers. Now I would guess that there's hardly a Christian here this morning, or indeed anywhere in the whole of the world, who is not in some kind of need - whatever that particular need might be. It may be material need, it may be a mental need or spiritual need, but it's a need of some kind. Praise God, as believers, New Testament Christians, the need that there has been to meet our sinfulness and our guilt before God has been utterly completed and finished and finalised, final redemption has been met for us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ - and we praise God and worship Him for that. We have already been doing that today around the Lord's Table, the fact that the exceeding greatness of His grace has met our need in our awful depravity and sinfulness, in the person and redemption of the Lord Jesus Christ - but yet, after we are saved and are converted and become Christians, our need doesn't finish there. We don't just have everything on a plate while we wait in the Christian life, but we're still subject to trials, to testings, temptations, and we often still need guidance, we need to hear the voice of God day by day in our lives. At times when we face challenges and difficulties, we need fresh courage from the hand and strength of God.

Regardless of whatever our need may be, Paul tells us in this text which is so famous and so often is framed on our walls - and I have a painting in the house with this on it - but how often is it really entered into by our hearts: that our God, yes He has conditions to have our needs supplied, but if those conditions are met, that we can have the confidence that whatever our particular need is, God can and will meet that need. Maybe it's a physical need that you have here today, or a social, relational need, or an intellectual need in your mind, or spiritual need in your heart, soul and spirit - every need, God says to us, and it is God's word, that need will be met.

But it would be remiss of us not to note today, as we look at this so oft-quoted and claimed text, to see that there are certain conditions upon which this promise is fulfilled from God to us. Maybe the reason why you aren't experiencing the joy, the contentment, the peace, the freedom and the liberty and release that you can know from God providing for your every need, it's maybe because you're not fulfilling the conditions of this verse. We learn the conditions by looking at the context, where we find it - you'll remember from our reading, chapter 4, we looked at verses 14, 15 and 16 - he's talking about how the Philippian Christians had met his need financially. In other words, when Paul was in need they filled the gap financially for the apostle. Now Paul is coming to them and saying: 'Because you by your sacrificial giving met my need, I am absolutely confident that God will meet your need'.

I hope you see the connection here: because these Philippians met Paul's need, he could tell them: 'Now God is going to meet your need'. So we're beginning to see the foundation of the conditions of how we can know this confidence and God's provision, even in our own individual lives. Here's the first condition - condition number one: it must be a need that is created by meeting another person's need. God will provide our every need when our need has come because we are sacrificially giving to the Lord. Now it mightn't be directly related, but as long as we are sacrificially giving to the Lord and His work we can be sure that God will meet our need. Listen to what J.H. Pickford said, he puts it in words that I couldn't put it, so I'll just quote it to you - he asks the

question: 'What grounds have we to lay hold of this promise to supply our needs, if we have refused to supply the needs of God's work and we have had the means? With what confidence can we pray for the Lord to honour us with substance, if we have not honoured Him with substance that He has already given? This is the ageless principle in the economy of God: what we withhold withers, what we lay aside is spoiled, but what we release returns - if we fill full another's needs, God will fill full our needs'.

Please don't miss this, and we may only get through these conditions this morning and have to look next week at the promise, but it's vitally important if we're to enter into the joy and fullness and the release of this promise that we understand that it's not just willy-nilly given carte blanche to everybody who just prays it in the prayer meeting. There are conditions, and the first condition is this: you should have a need in your life because it has been created by giving to someone else's need, by filling another's need. In other words, their need was not created by extravagance. They weren't spending left, right and centre and that's why they were in need. It wasn't a need created by slothfulness - in other words, they weren't deciding: 'I'll just sit on my backside and not go out to work, and I'll take all the dole money that the society and government will give to me, and God will provide my need'. If you're doing that, God forgive you, that is presumption of the highest order and testing God! It's not a need given by overambition or unwise investments, or foolish and unnecessary spending, but the claim that we have upon this promise - verse 19 - is solely legitimate when it is because we have poured our resources into someone else's need, and only then can we know God's provision to our need - the gap that has been left by our sacrifice for others.

Don't ever take up verses like this and say: 'Well, here we are, this is an easy way to live, isn't it? Let's live like George Mueller', and not see that George Mueller and men of God like George Mueller, and lesser men, have known this promise fulfilled - but they have also known in their life a sacrificial secret giving to others needs, even out of their own poverty. That's what the Philippians did - we remember it in the Acts - God will meet our need when it is a need that is created when we've met the needs of others. This isn't a ticket to carefree ease, it's not some kind of - as some scholars said - an 'open sesame' to slothful plenty. There's a principle here: that God will provide for you when you meet the needs of others.

Now we'll tease that out a little bit more, and there's a second condition that outflows from that, and it's this: God's promises to meet human needs are always for a purpose. God will not supply your need to live it up, to get more comfortable, but God provides your need for a purpose - and God's purpose is never ever to relieve an individual of his responsibility, but rather He gives us a responsibility in stewardship. That's what the whole word and concept means, that when God gives us something, He gives us with the gift a responsibility to discharge that gift as He has ordained. Do you see it? It's not only has the gap and the poverty been made by giving to another, but the implication is that after we have given to the other, and the space and the emptiness is left, that when God provides the need that is there that that need is also provided to give on again and again and again!

Is that not what Paul meant when he said in 2 Corinthians 9:8: 'And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work'? Paul again is commending another church that gave to him, and he's saying: 'God is going to make you abound' - in other words, what you have given to me, He's going to give you much more back, but the reason why He's giving you that back is so that you can abound more and more in good works, doing the same as you've already done. So you see that this promise has the first condition that the need that you have ought to be some need in your life that has been created by meeting another's need, but secondly: when your need is met, it is met for a purpose, that you might abound more and more in doing good to others. It's not: 'I've done my good turn, and God has supplied my need again, and that's it'.

Here's the third condition: it has to be a gift, it has to be a gift. Now let me say that this is very contemporary, and as you know I have not engineered this this morning, because we've been going through this book of

Philippians for many weeks now, and we're coming up very soon to a building project that, God willing, will be realised in the weeks that lie ahead. We will be looking to God through His people to supply the financial need necessary. God will supply that need, but I believe that it has to be a gift from God's people. In other words, we'll not be having jumble sales or church raffles, because to buy a ticket in a church raffle or daffodil tea or whatever you want to call it, or to get a bargain at a jumble sale, it's not a gift - it's not a gift! It's a financial transaction for which you have exchanged money for a commodity, whether it be food or clothing or something else. It's not giving sacrificially to God, it's an exchange, it's a business deal if you like. One author, and I think he's right, said: 'This is a depraved and a disgraceful form of church finance which robs the church giving of its significance. It prostitutes stewardship, it degrades ethics, it robs people of the inestimable privilege and God of the perfume of Christian devotion, because it cannot become an odour of sweet smell or a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God'.

Look at verse 18: 'I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God'. Now I do not adhere to the health and wealth doctrine within the church. I believe that God is no man's debtor, and I believe that if you're giving you will abound in your reception to give even more - but let me tell you this: it has to be a gift. One thing that the health and wealth movement does is it robs of the believer the inestimable privilege of giving sacrificially and worshipping the Lord through your financial devotion to God, and it not only robs the Christian of that privilege of stewardship but it robs the God of heaven of the sweet smelling odour and savour of giving to Him financially. Now if you're getting something back in return it can't be seen as a gift, can it? That scholar that I quoted said: 'A return to basic New Testament stewardship would produce one of the greatest revivals of spiritual life ever known in the church', and I believe him!

The first condition: it has to be a need that has been created by meeting another person's need like the Philippians. Secondly: the human need, when it is met, has been met for a purpose - to continue doing good for others. Number three: it has to be a gift - there can't be something in it for you, and you shouldn't just give to the Lord because you know He's going to give you back an awful lot more. Number four, and this is important also: it is personal benevolence. It's personal benevolence, rather than an institutional benevolence. You see, if we were to suddenly set up an Iron Hall Social Office, where you would come and give whatever need that you had, and allow the agencies - whether they be big denominational ones - to distribute your benevolence, you lose the effect of personal contact with the need and the needy one. You're not personally supplying the need, and you're not coming personally in contact with the one who has the need, and there's a tremendous ministry, there's a great thrill not only in the heart of God as a sweet smelling savour, but in the heart of the giver for it is more blessed to give than to receive, and also in the heart of the receiver to know that their brethren care enough for them to meet their need.

I hope I haven't given you too many conditions, but they're what I find within this passage. It has to be a need that is created by giving to the need of another; it has to be a need that has been given into your lap in order for the purpose of helping other people; it should be a gift; and it should be by personal benevolence. Let me say this to all of us as we enter into the great financial challenges of the days that lie ahead of us: Hudson Taylor, a man of God, one of the pioneer missionaries to China who knew God supernaturally providing for him all along his life, said this: 'When God's work is done in God's way for God's glory, it will not lack for God's supply'.

Now if we take it individually to each of us, and we want to know how we can enter into the fulfilment of this verse: do God's work! And if you're not doing any work for God, and if you're not seeking God's supply for His work, and if you're not doing God's work in God's way, and not doing it for the glory of God, you will not know God's supply. Maybe that's why you're in poverty today, and I'm not just talking about financial poverty, I'm talking about all of those material, physical and spiritual needs - that could be the reason! But what a blessing if, like the Philippians, you fill Paul's cup to overflowing, out of your own poverty you meet his need sacrificially, you can then depend on - as you put your cup out to God - that He will fill it to overflowing!

Now let's begin dissecting this verse that we may learn. Once those conditions are fulfilled you can know many things, four of which I'm going to share with you. One: the source of the supply. Two: the surety of the supply. Three: the sufficiency of the supply. And four: the standard of the supply - and Leeman Strauss, I borrowed those titles from him. The first is the source of the supply, and it's just found in the first three words of verse 19: 'But my God shall supply all your need' - there is the source of it! All earthly wealth, there's nothing intrinsically evil in it, it is the love of money that is the root of all evil - but we must remember that it is transient, it is temporary, and the wealth and fashion of this world - as John says in 1 John 2:17 - 'it passeth away'. It disappears, and therefore to put our faith in financial terms and the monetary societies of this world is fatal, for depressions will come - and it can wipe out, overnight, our fortunes. Thieves can break in, as the Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount, and steal our entire life savings away. Time even deteriorates the wonderful edifices and buildings that we have erected to man's pride and strength. But isn't it wonderful to know the source where our supply is coming from and where our need is met - and it is none other than Almighty God! It is the God of heaven, the God of the universe from whom no one and nothing can impoverish Him and take His wealth away from Him. He is the one who accumulated, He created the wealth in every mine, He created the cattle on thousand hills, and because He is the one who has accumulated all the wealth that there is in existence, He is the God who allocates it, and He is the source of that supply.

Riches are safe with Him, and that's why the Lord Jesus told us not to build up treasures on the earth but in heaven. Now, therefore it's important to realise where we ought to go to get whatever supply we need, whatever is our specific lack, it is to God. That's the importance of knowing the source, and because it is God - and it's not just the God in heaven, or a God, but isn't it wonderful to be able to say like Paul: 'My God' - my God! My God...surely doesn't that reveal His proximity to us in our need, that He is nearby, near to our need, He knows our need, He knows how our need can be met. He is more than just a distant impersonal Deity, but He's actually in the very depths of our experience - He is our personal heavenly Father who takes note of the little sparrow that falls, who clothes the lily of the field, and He is in our midst - He is available to be the supply and the source of that supply. When we can't see our way in life, you can say: 'I don't know what the direction is, but my God knows!'. When you don't know where the money is coming from to pay the bills, you can say: 'I don't know, but my God knows, He is my support!'. You don't know how you're going to get through this sickness, the ailment, the trial in your home with your children and all the rest - whatever the need is, isn't it wonderful to be able to turn to a source that is heavenly and say: 'My God! I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore'.

In Psalm 121 and Psalm 122 he said: 'As a servant looks to the hand of his master, so I look to you O God. As a maid looks to the hand of her mistress, I will look to God for my need'. Who is this God? Ephesians 1, turn with me for a moment, our brother Hugh quoted from this passage in the Breaking of Bread service - but let's just see who this God is, and I want to take time over these things because they really thrilled my heart this morning, even as I'm preaching, and I believe they'll do you good too if you let them into your heart. Verse 19, this is the God of the risen Christ, the God who has exceeding greatness of power to us who believe, 'according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead'. My God, who is He? He is the God who raised Christ from the grave! Go on: 'and set him at the right hand of God in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come'. He's the God of the risen Christ, and He's the God of the ascended Christ!

My friend, if you just for one moment consider that this is the God who does the impossible, the God that raises the dead, the God that exalts a human being - and He is the Christ of course, but remember that it is human flesh

that sits at the right hand of God! Should you not ask the question: 'Well, if He can do all that, can He not meet my need? Can He not help me?'. Think of how He's the great intercessor, He's not just risen and exalted and ascended, but He's at the right hand of God, and the Bible says He is there for us as our advocate, as our representative, our friend. He's the one who hears our petitions and presents them to God; He is the one who dispenses the need that we have from the throne of God; He is there with our Father! That gives me great help today, because He is there we have the right of constant intervention with God, and efficient aid from the hand of God. He is the Great High Priest touched with the feelings of our infirmities, because He was tested in all points like as we are yet without sin - and because of that we can come with boldness unto the throne of grace to find mercy and help in time of our need.

What a great intercessor, such a friend as that - could the need that you have ever fail to come? I love Robert Murray M'Cheyne, and one thing that he said, I stuck it in my Bible, is this: 'If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear one million enemies - yet distant makes no difference, He is praying for me and He is the God of heaven'. We don't have time to go through the book of Revelation, but what do we know about heaven? Well we know it needs no sun, we know that it's walls are of jewels, and its pavements are of gold, and the glorious new Jerusalem has countless streets that stretch right throughout it 1,500 miles north, south, east and west - and then moves as high up as it goes long in its area. It goes to mid-heaven, for the length and breadth and height of it are equal - and we're asking ourselves: 'Now this is the supply for my need, and if this is the kind of place God can create and build, can He meet my need?'. We have so little faith at times, don't we? This is a source of our supply: 'My God'!

Secondly is the surety of that supply: 'My God shall supply all your need'. Now if anything should cast all the doubts and fears out of our minds, it should be that word 'shall'. He's saying there's never an occasion when this will fail, as long as we've fulfilled the conditions of course. We should never fear that God will never honour us whenever we honour Him. The reason why Paul was so sure is because he was aware of the source, and when you get a grasp of the source you can know the assurance of it because you know that this God is the one who supplies your need and He cannot fail to do so because of who He is. When others fail to come to your rescue, my God shall. When the well runs dry, when the barrel is empty, when you cannot, my God shall. When there seems to be no way of reaching your needs at all, humanly speaking, what a blessing to know even when you can't see it, but by faith my God shall!

It is this law that when you give you will receive from the Lord, it's a constant law of the word of God and in His world. Jesus said: 'Give, and it shall be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over shall be given into your bosom. For with what measure ye meet it shall be measured to you again'. It's not health and wealth, but it is this: God is no man's debtor! If you lend your boat for a whole afternoon to the Christ of God that He might make a floating pulpit out of it, by the end of the night your boat will be filled with fish. If you lend your Upper Room to the Lord Jesus Christ at His disposal for a Passover meal, not too long will transpire until that whole room is filled by the pentecostal power of the Holy Ghost - in fact the whole house is shaken! He will not only satisfy hunger if you place in His hands the barley loaves and the fish, but He will add 12 baskets full on top of it all!

This is the surety of supply, and what a supply it is! It is God's return to us! You remember when the good Samaritan was leaving the village inn on the morning after the memorable rescue of the wounded traveller, what did he say to the host? 'Take care of him, and what thou spendest more, when I come I will repay'. You have to give cheerfully of course, and we've covered all that, let's move on swiftly and we may have time. There is the sufficiency of His supply. There's the source: my God; the surety: He shall; the sufficiency: all your need.

His experience, Paul said in these verses: 'I have received full payment' - verse 18: 'I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus'. Now we don't know how much Epaphroditus sent from the church at Philippi, but he is able to cry: 'I am amply supplied'. Now have you ever seen such a paradox and seeming

contradiction as this: this little man, bow-legged they say and with a big nose and bald, sitting in this prison absolutely poor, impoverished, not a penny to his name, chained to a Roman soldier at the behest and will of a Roman tyrant, almost perhaps persuaded at the beginning that he was going to his death, inevitably would under Nero - yet he said: 'I am amply supplied'.

He said not so long ago in chapter 3: 'I have suffered the loss of all things'. He said in Corinthians that he was hated, persecuted, an outcast to Judaism. He awaited trial many times, on occasions he hung by a thread, by the capricious will of Roman tyrants and governors. He was a man who, he said, bore in his body the dying marks of the Lord Jesus with scars and beatings and scourgings and shipwrecks, privations of every kind - and only a few days before he received, it could have been a couple of pence from this church in Philippi, maybe a bit of clothing or a barley roll - I don't know, but I'm sure it wasn't thousands or millions! Was he mad in the head? Had the damp in the cell rotted his brains out, that he could say: 'I am amply supplied'? No! He measured his wealth in a higher sense than this world can understand.

He said in 1 Timothy 1:14: 'the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus'. He had a hope of which he could boast. Listen to this hope: 'I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord'. What a hope! What a love he had! He could say: 'So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have, and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less?'. What a love! What a victory he experienced! He could say: 'Nay, in all these things - I am killed almost every day, like a lamb sent to the slaughter, but in all these things I am more than conqueror through Him that loved me'. In His many sacrifices he could say: 'Nay, in all these things, but even if I'm being poured out like a drink offering in the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you' - and in his sufferings he was so little disturbed, because he could say: 'I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me, however I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I may finish the race, complete the task the Lord has given me: the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace'. Because he fulfilled God's will for his life, God filled his life full of His supply.

That is the sufficiency of the supply, and then fourthly and finally the standard of the supply: according to His riches in glory. Now I'm not able to tell you what that means. His riches in glory - I know it includes the vast wealth that there is in the universe, I know it's a great deal to do with the gospel that we've entered into, but all that I could tell you this morning is just a mere drop in the bucket of God's riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Here of course it means financial and physical needs, but we read in other places where Paul says that he knew the riches of God's goodness. He says in Romans that he knows the riches of the wisdom of God; he says in Ephesians 1:7 he knew the riches of the grace of God; Ephesians 3:16 the riches of God's glory - and the standard of what God gives us is not out of His riches, the way you and I would do - 'Here's a tenner or 20 pounds' - but He gives you according to His riches, to the standard and extent of it. That's the standard of the supply.

What are His riches? I'll tell you what they are: in Him, in Christ dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and we are complete in Him. If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Isn't that wonderful? Ask yourself, dear child in need, if He give up His Son, will He not meet my need? Imagine going into a jewellers and buying a diamond ring for the wife, costing you thousands, almost bankrupt, and then you say: 'Could I have a wee brown paper bag to wrap that up in please?', and they say: 'No, no, we can't afford that'. He gave His only Son, do you not think that He could meet any need, every need, when He has given to that extent He is able to do exceeding abundantly more than we ask or think! Christ is God's answer to our need, He's been the answer to every question we've asked going through this Philippian epistle, hasn't He? To desire, to satisfaction in life, and now the provision and the supply and the standard of that supply is according to His

riches in glory in Christ Jesus, for in Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden, and it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell. In that divine human person there is everything that any of us need!

He filleth all in all, Paul said. He is the compliment for our need, or you could say He's the completeness for our need. Whatever our deficiency is, the greater it is, the greater His supply and the larger the extent of it. But do you know what is needed? What is needed that we, as we often do, don't go through life as if we can meet the demands of our life, and we can supply our needs? But rather that we reckon these promises as our own, we avail ourselves of all of the treasures that are prepared for us in the person of our risen, exalted and glorified Lord. The reason why we don't often enter into this truth is because we limit the exchequer of the Holy One of God.

Let me tell you a story as I close. There was a man, and this story was told by Dr Richard Newton, of an old and poverty stricken Red Indian in the States, who many years ago made his way into the Western settlement in search of food to keep him from starving. A bright coloured ribbon was seen around his neck from which there hung a little small dirty pouch or money purse. On being asked what it was, the illiterate Indian said: 'I think it's a charm that was given to me in my younger days, and he opened it'. The man that took it out saw a bit of worn paper, crumpled and torn, and when it was read it was found on inspection to be a regular discharge from the federal army. The signature that was on it was none other than George Washington himself. What it was was entitling that Red Indian, who had fought in the war, to a pension for the rest of his life. Here was a man with a promise duly signed, sealed and delivered, and if it had been presented into the right source and hand and place it would have secured him ample provision for all of his life - yet he wandered around the desert hungry, helpless, forlorn, and begging bread to keep him from starving.

Is that not like us at times? When there's a heavenly Father spoken of in this benediction: 'Now unto God and our Father', a Father who has His eye on His children, and a Father whose hand is outstretched to provide their relief, whatever that may be. D. L. Moody, the great evangelist, preached on verse 19 on one occasion better than me. His outline was this, he called his sermon: 'God's Cheque'. He said: 'My God', that is the name of the firm on the cheque, 'My God'. 'Shall supply', that is the promise to pay. 'All your need', that is the amount to be paid. 'His riches', that is the deposit in the account against which the cheque is drawn. 'In glory', that is the address of the bank. 'By Christ Jesus', that is the signature that appears on the cheque. This cheque needs but one thing to make it a practical and valuable thing, and that is the endorsement of your faith on the reverse side' - and then, whatever your need, God will abundantly supply it.

We have finished Philippians, and may God receive the glory due in verses 20 and 22 and 23. Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen

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