PHILIPPIANS

The Fight for Joy

Red Oak Church, Andrews, North Carolina

July 24, 2016 –

*(All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.)*

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Philippians 1:1-2 & Acts 16

Brody Holloway

(Rob Conti)

As a church, what we are committed to is working through books of the Bible; taking the Word of God and studying it to see what God is saying in the text. So, any time we come in here to preach the sermon is coming from the text. The main points of the sermon, no matter who is preaching, will be right from that passage. So, we invite you, and we want you guys to be studying along with us through that book, so that your mind is moving that direction, and that during the week in discipleship groups that study is getting reinforced. All of us know that it’s so easy to go sit in a Sunday service or listen to a podcast and enjoy a sermon and be encouraged as the Word of God does its work, but how often is it that even just twelve hours later that that message is gone and you are not even thinking about it? So, the discipleship groups in the middle of the week are so important and we want the focus of those to be how is that message then impacting your life? Not necessarily going further into what it means, but how we are applying that as a group of believers. So, we encourage you to be studying along and we encourage you to be part of a discipleship group. It’s going to be an awesome study through the book of Philippians.

Most of you already know or have heard, but I wanted to let you know the sad news that this morning Baby Ava passed away. Her battle that she’s had since she was born, she has succumbed to those initial issues with her brain and her lungs. She has passed away and she is with the Lord. We want to say as a church, and on behalf of Blue and Britt, thank you so much for your constant prayers and the encouragement that you were sending to them. I want to ask you to continue to do that and to continue to pray for them. I think a lot of us have that feeling of wondering what we can do. Just continue to pray. Pray for their strength. Pray for their joy in the midst of intense sorrow and suffering that they are experiencing right now and the grieving that they are experiencing—that they would experience that in the Lord and in the joy that the Lord will provide in the middle of their sorrow. So, please continue to pray for them. Again, on their behalf, I want to say thank you again for how you’ve supported them through this. Please continue.

I’m going to read from Psalm 42:1-5,

“As a deer pants for flowing streams,

so pants my soul for you, O God.

2 My soul thirsts for God,

for the living God.

When shall I come and appear before God?

3 My tears have been my food

day and night,

while they say to me all the day long,

“Where is your God?”

4 These things I remember,

as I pour out my soul:

how I would go with the throng

and lead them in procession to the house of God

with glad shouts and songs of praise,

a multitude keeping festival.

5 Why are you cast down, O my soul,

and why are you in turmoil within me?

Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,

my salvation and my God.”

Pray with me.

Lord Jesus, we love you. As we come together tonight as a body of believers, we ask that your Spirit would meet with us and that you would free us now in these moments to worship you in spirit and in truth. God, we worship you because you are worthy, because you are God and there is no other. You alone are our Savior, our King, our Priest, our Prophet, and I pray that your Spirit would free us to love you and worship you the way that you deserve to be worshipped. I pray that we would have good fellowship with one another tonight by your Spirit and that your Spirit would minister the truth of your Word to our hearts and minds and that you would sanctify us, grow us, and that you would draw people to yourself for salvation. God, I pray by that same Spirit, by your Spirit, by the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, that you would minister to the hearts of Blue and Britt right now, and that you would uphold them in their sorrow and their grief, and that you would uphold them and strengthen them and give them a peace that passes understanding or comprehension, and that you would give them a joy that can’t be touched by anything in this world. God, we pray that you would be glorified in that. As you bring them back to the states, we pray that you would give them safe travels and that you would give them a good time of rest and time with their family, Lord. Tonight, Lord, we pray that you would anoint Brody to open your Word and to speak truth for your glory and that Jesus would be exalted. I pray this in Christ’s name, Amen.

(Brody Holloway)

We are not going to make you stand up or do anything weird. We’re not even going to make you fill out any information, but we do want to welcome you. We hope that you will feel the presence of the Lord here. We love to study God’s Word together.

If you have been coming or if you are looking for a church, Rob mentioned discipleship groups. I would encourage you, if you attend one of those discipleship groups every week, that it’s great if you bring something to the table there. That’s where conversation happens. That’s where we talk through the text. That’s where we are able to sharpen each other and encourage each other. That’s where you are going to get to know people best.

One of the things that I love about Red Oak is that people don’t get in a hurry to leave. I travel around and preach a lot and this is a true story; a lot of times I’ll be preaching in a church and it won’t be long after the service is over that somebody is flicking the lights on and off. Some crusty old church guy is basically saying that it’s time to go; we’ve got to get to the Golden Corral. Fortunately, there’s no Golden Corral in Andrews. Well, sometimes that’s unfortunate, but when it’s time to leave church that’s fortunate because nobody is in a hurry. So, we do have a good time of fellowship afterwards, and I love that, but I encourage you to maybe try one of the discipleship groups. I think you’ll enjoy that and that’s where we kind of slow things down and really get to know each other.

So, a little background to the Church in Philippi. We are only going to look at two verses tonight—Chapter 1, verses 1-2. It says,

“Paul and Timothy, servants…”

The word for servant there is ‘doulas,’ which is a slave. Which, in the context, keep this in mind when you see the word ‘doulas’, that it’s ‘servant’, or some translations say ‘bondservant’ or other translations say ‘slave.’ Let me put this in context. The thing about the Church of Philippi, and we are going to see this in a bit of detail in a minute, is that the city of Philippi was a Roman colony. We will see that when we read over in Acts 16. This is the first church that is founded in Europe, so if you have done any backstudy going into this study in Philippians or if you have done any reading this week, you’ve seen that it’s the first church that’s founded in Europe. So, when the Gospel comes to Philippi it comes to Europe. We are going to see that it was miraculous and very divinely appointed, the way that God moved to get disciples there, or missionaries there, and the Church got planted in Philippi. But, the word ‘slave’ in the Roman context was a gritty, powerful, cultural word that we just miss. We don’t get it. You can study it all you want, but you know how you can study something as much as you can but it’s not the same as being there and feeling the weight of it.

Take somebody who may be a history buff and they like to study time periods. You can read people’s journals and read people writing about something and you can really get into a mindset. Or you could go and look at items that come out of that era but you can only go so far in really feeling what it was like to live in that culture, can’t you? You study about another culture or another place. If you’ve ever studied about a place and then gone and visited that place, you realize that it’s not what you thought it was going to be like. That’s because there are certain cultural aspects of being someplace where it takes a long time—even most missionaries will say that you need three or four years to really feel like you are engrained in the culture and the culture is engrained in you.

So, when we hear the word ‘slave’ a couple of things happen. One, we think of something like European slavery that was part of what early America took part in, which was horrible, but that’s the only context we have of slavery. But, in the Roman culture and context, you are talking about everything from the gladiatorial arenas where they would fight for entertainment with slaves, to people selling themselves into slavery in order to pay bills or pay debt. Fathers would give away their daughters or sons to pay debts. Probably, a lot of you have at some point studied a little about slavery, but the weight or the thud of that word in Philippi would have been greater than it was even in Palestine, because this is Roman. This is Roman—this is Rome—and slavery is Roman. So, when Paul says we are slaves of Christ Jesus, we are ‘doulas’—we are enslaved. It’s reminiscent of the book of Romans, where in chapter 6, Paul says that you used to be a slave to sin but now you’re a slave to righteousness. Those are powerful words, where someone submits themselves to or is brought into captivity to—it’s kind of all those things in one—the Gospel captures, the Gospel rescues, the Gospel enslaves, and we surrender to that slavery all at the same time. It’s a powerful word. So, he says that Paul and Timothy are slaves of Christ Jesus, and,

“To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now, like we said, we are going to turn over to Acts 16. Actually, I want to look at a couple of verses in Acts 15. So, let’s jump over there and get the background on this city of Philippi, specifically the Church and how the Church was founded there.

So, for a quick background history. There is this missionary team made up of a guy named Barnabas and a guy named Saul, okay? You can read about this earlier in the book of Acts. They go and they are predominately travelling around Asia. They are planting churches and here is their method of church planting. This guy, Saul, had been a rabbi in the Jewish Church, so that was something that gave him a lot of credibility. They would go into a town, go into a synagogue, and Saul would speak in the synagogue, and that’s why you might remember Paul saying that the Gospel was to the Jew first and then to the Greek. If they had gone to Gentiles first, the Jews would not have listened because it would have been a pagan, or Gentile, religion. So, when it says it’s to the Jew first, it’s not just this idea that the Jews were the favorites; it’s the idea that for the Gospel to do its work through the promises of Judaism, in the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the Patriarchs and all of that, it had to go to the synagogue, and then from the synagogue the Gospel would spread to Gentiles, and that would be to any Greek people. So, that was kind of the way that they would take the Gospel around. They would go into a city and they would proclaim the Gospel, and see converts, and see people come to faith—both Jews and Gentiles. They would establish a church, and you might remember Paul telling the Ephesians, there used to be two people, Gentiles and Jews, but now there is a third category, Christian, made up of both. So, the Gospel is having that work. These missionary journeys occurred where Saul and Barnabas and their team would travel around, and preach, and proclaim the Gospel.

And there was a guy named John Mark. He is the same man who is known as writing the Gospel of Mark. So, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—that Mark. He is a young man and he’s a nephew to this guy named Barnabas. Barnabas and Mark are on the team and they come to a very difficult place in ministry and Mark totally chickens out. He doesn’t have what it takes and he bails. In fact, you will see this happen often on the mission field. I was talking with Jay, who is Bobby Lane’s direct boss with the Echelon[[1]](#footnote-1) team, this past week, and he was giving me stats and numbers of how many missionaries wash out in the first year. It’s a really, really high number, particularly when you are talking about bush people, like going into the bush or the jungle. Jay lived in the Amazon for ten years, I think, and now he’s been in East Africa for six, or something like that. People have a more difficult time going and staying in the more remote places. They just wash out because they can’t handle it. So, this happens to John Mark. There are different ideas about exactly what happened, but we know that he backed out. He quit the team.

So, that didn’t sit well with Saul, who would later become Paul. That didn’t sit well with Paul. He was not okay with it that John Mark bailed and went home. But, they went on and continued the work and did great things. The first missionary journey was completed and they sort of rebooted and started doing this thing again and there came a point in chapter 15 of Acts, in verse 36, and it says,

“And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” 37 Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia…”

So, Barnabas is like, “Let’s take my nephew. He’s ready to roll now,” and Paul says, “Un uh. Nope. Not going to do it.” Let me explain something. Just because you apologize, doesn’t remove all the consequences sometimes. There is this really wrong idea—and I’m not going to pick a side here between Barnabas and Paul in this argument—but there is this idea that if you are going to forgive somebody that you have to wipe the slate clean and let them start from ground zero. But, y’all, that is just not practical. That’s not practical. There will be times when you will extend forgiveness to someone but there will be residual consequences to their actions. Do you understand what I’m saying? An example of that would be that if a man has been unfaithful to his wife there may be longstanding repercussions to that. If he leaves her and then she is free biblically to remarry, and she remarries and he comes back and says he’s sorry, is she supposed to leave this guy that she is now in a covenant relationship with? No. See there can be residual consequences. Likewise, in the Church, if the Church is vigilant and faithful, there may be times when someone may come under the hand of discipline. You can even think of this as a parent. If you have raised teenagers there may be a point where you take something away from that teenager, like something that they would consider a right but you would consider a privilege. You say, “Sorry, but you don’t get to do that anymore,” and they say, “But I said, ‘I’m sorry.’” “Okay, great, I accept your apology.” “So, you should give me the car keys back.” Not always, right? It doesn’t always work that way. There are sometimes residual consequences.

Young people, ‘residual’ means something that lingers, something that hangs around. Okay? So, there are other times when, through repentance and through forgiveness, the opportunity is there for that person to rebuild the confidence of the Church. An example that I would think of would be like when I was talking with Jay this week. We have a ministry partnership with a team that we have done some work with here in the states and they do restoration ministry with men and women who are dealing with sexual addiction. The guy who spearheads that was once an IMB missionary who fell into major sexual sin on the field and set back a work among an African people group by about a hundred years. It will take two or three generations to get over what damage he did, but he is now faithfully serving in ministry, but it was a long, long process, under supervision of pastors who were faithful. So, he has worked through that, and his wife worked through it with him, so they are faithfully married to each other, and they are doing ministry, but there are repercussions to his actions that may take two or three generations to deal with. Sometimes that’s how it works.

So, what you have with Paul and Barnabas is Paul saying, “Hey, I get it, he’s sorry. I get that he went back and spent four or five years getting rehabilitated from being a mama’s boy.” Whatever. Paul was a straight shooter. But, Paul’s like, “He ain’t going. He ain’t on my team. He’s not going to be on my team. He needs to go prove himself.” And I want to say to the younger generation, remove from your mind the idea of entitlement—that you deserve something that you haven’t worked your hind end off for. Not just in the secular world but in ministry. Just because you go to Bible college and get a degree or go to seminary, doesn’t mean somebody is going to hand you the keys to a ministry and say, “Go run it. You’re gifted.” That’s not how it works.

We know that John Mark goes on to become a great minister of the Gospel. In fact, he has apostolic authority because he writes one of the Gospels. But, there is this breakdown in the team where it says that Paul thinks it is not best for him to go. In fact, in verse 39,

“There arose a sharp disagreement.”

For you guys that like to parse things out, look it up in the Greek, and break words down, and do word studies, go study “sharp disagreement.” “Sharp disagreement” is a nice way of saying it. They were at each other’s throats over this, and I want to tell you something, one of the things that should separate Christians from the world is that we should know how to fight with each other and not destroy relationships. We should know how to deal with conflict and not destroy relationships. Because, the reason I’m going back this far in the story is that out of this sharp disagreement, God created two missionary teams and blessed the known world. Because, when there is conflict and conflict is handled biblically, it may be painful but God will grow churches and ministries as a result of the faithfulness of people dealing with that conflict. If there is anything that we should do differently than the world—there are a lot of things—but if there is anything that should look differently in the Church than it looks in the world, it’s the way we deal with conflict. We work toward reconciliation and we work toward restoration of fellowship, but sometimes that reconciliation will lead to people going in opposite directions. Who was right, Paul or Barnabas? We don’t know. I think that most people tend to go, “I’m on Paul’s team.” That’s because everybody wants Paul to like them. I want Paul to like me. Barnabas was “the son of encouragement.” Nobody thinks, “I want Barnabas on my team,” because Barnabas was just nice to everybody. But, here you have this sharp disagreement where they are arguing, and look at this,

“So, they separated from each other.”

This was like a church split. They separated and they went in opposite directions of each other. Now, here’s what’s awesome about this. We don’t know how many years later it was, but when Paul was writing his very last letter, and he was getting ready to die, and he was writing a letter to Timothy, and he said, “My body is being poured out and I’m going to be like an offering to God. I’m getting ready to die,” he says, “Send me John Mark because he is useful to me for ministry[[2]](#footnote-2).” Isn’t that awesome. Paul loved him enough to say to him, “You’re not going to be on my team. Go prove yourself,” and then he was humble enough to let John Mark prove himself and not only bring him back on the team, but he was one of the last ones standing with Paul in Paul’s final day. That’s what biblical Church conflict is supposed to look like. And what explodes out of this conflict is a number of churches, including the Church at Philippi.

Mark goes with Barnabas and they go to Cyprus, and we know that work was done there. Now, look what happened. Verse 40,

“But Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”

So, they go and you have this new ministry team. It’s Paul, and Silas, and Luke—because Luke is writing it—and if you jump down to Acts 16:1, they pick up Timothy. Have you heard of that guy? He was pretty legendary in the early Church. Acts 16:1,

“Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.”

Okay, now here’s what’s taking shape. Now you have this missionary team—watch this—Paul is a rabbi on the Jewish side but remember that Paul is, by birth, a Roman citizen. So, Paul is Jewish and Roman, and watch this, Timothy is Jewish and Greek. Is there a cultural context that they cannot go into now? No, God has put a team together that can go anywhere in the Greek or Roman world. Are you guys tracking with this? God is putting this team together that can go to the Greeks, and the Romans, and the Jews, with authority and cultural acceptance. You will see, throughout other missionary journeys, that God uses that, and it is this really neat little lesson tucked into the Scripture, where you realize that, “Everything that God is doing in my life will probably fit into the greater work that He wants to do at some point.” Nothing is random.

Nothing is random. Where you are from, your accent, your family background, the color of your skin, or something so simple as eye color, or hair color, when God begins to use you in ministry—you’re tall, you’re short, you went through a divorce, you went through abuse, you were an addict, you were not an addict and you grew up in a church, you made a lot of money, you did not make a lot of money—whatever God is doing in your life, as He’s writing your story, He is going to use that, if you submit to him, to write a bigger story that ties into the main story. That’s what’s happening. When you are reading in these narratives, like in the book of Acts, names and places, these are names of real people and real places, because God is writing a real story. And the Church at Philippi is going to fit into that.

So, Paul picks up this kid named Timothy and brings him under his wing. We know that he then begins to mentor and disciple him. Timothy would go on then to pastor churches. The most well-known would be the church at Ephesus. It was a hostile and crazy, pagan city, where they were having to tell them, “Hey, don’t get drunk while you are having worship services. Don’t have sex with prostitutes while you are having worship services.” They were pagan and then they began to follow Christ, but they brought a lot of their pagan practices into the Church, so Paul sent Timothy there to pastor, and lead, and kind of straighten things out.

So, Paul is putting this team together that is going to make a really deep impact. Now watch this, in Acts 16:6,

“And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.”

You will recognize Galatia from the book of Galatians. Okay, so here’s something interesting –their ministry is contingent on the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In the life of the believer, don’t downplay that the Spirit of God should speak to you, and lead you, and guide you in decisions that you make. As a church, we want to be Spirit led. The Bible says in Romans 8:14,

“All who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

If you are truly saved and you are a child of God, you can trust and believe that the Spirit of God will lead you in decisions that you make. So, moms and dads, when you are trying to decide how you are going to deal with this cantankerous one kid who is strong-willed, the Spirit of God will lead you in that. But, it’s important when the Spirit of God is leading us that we are obeying the Spirit of God and submitting and surrendering to it. He is not just making suggestions, because the Holy Spirit is God. So, the Holy Spirit doesn’t make suggestions because God doesn’t make suggestions. He leads and we follow. He leads and we follow. So, what’s happening now is that they are being led by the Spirit of God, because the Spirit of God cuts them off in Asia. He says, “You’re not doing ministry work in Asia anymore.”

“And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.”

Have you ever gotten frustrated because nothing seems to be lining up and nothing seems to be working right? Then, one day you realize, “Oh, God’s been orchestrating things to bring me from point A, not to point B but to point G. I had to do this crazy roundabout to get there.” Some of you, right now, that’s where you’re at in life. You’re like, “What is God doing with me? I feel like I’m all over the place. I feel like I don’t have any direction. What is happening?” But God is writing a story where He is taking circumstances, and maturing you, and teaching you. He’s taking things from your past, things from your present, and He’s connecting dots, and writing a story, and plugging your life into the greater work of the Gospel, and working for His good, and for our good, and it’s all coming together. A lot of times we are like, “I’m frustrated right now because of x, y, and z,” and God is saying, “Are you going to be faithful in your frustration?”

They wanted to go to this one place and God was like, “Okay, go,” and they get almost there and He’s like, “Nope, go that other way.” They went that way and He stopped them again. If you read Acts 16 and you get a map out, you think that those guys had to be so confused. They were over here and then they were over here. The door was opening, the door was closing, the window was closing, and they were like, “What are we doing?” Let’s be honest. We like to get an idea and then white-knuckled grab hold of the steering wheel and then drive it as hard as we can right at that idea. But, there are times where God is like, “Man, you better make sure the Spirit is leading you,” because the best ideas will fall flat if the Holy Spirit is not leading you in that. “Why is God doing this?” Because of His providence and because He is sovereign, which means that God does as He pleases, and at times we don’t understand exactly why He’s doing what He’s doing.



Paul is like, “We’ve got a plan. We’ve done this missionary journey once and we know what to do. We go into a town and I preach in the synagogue with my rabbinical robes. The Gospel breaks out. People start getting saved and crazy miracles happen. Peter and John are doing their thing. Philip is chasing down chariots. People are getting saved and they are baptizing people. Conversion is happening. We’ve got a plan, man. Keep working the plan. Keep working the plan.” And then God is like, “Stop.” See, sometimes the problem is that your plan begins to get in the way of God’s plan. God’s like, “No, no, no. Just because this is working, you need to understand that it’s not working because of your faithfulness. I’m blessing your faithfulness but it’s working because of my providence. It’s working because I have a plan, and the Gospel is going to spread, and I’m going to use the faithfulness of people to do that.”

This is one of the most amazing missionary stories. The first missionary that ever left the shores of the United States of America was a guy named Adoniram Judson[[3]](#footnote-3). Does anybody know about him? Has anyone read that story? It’s a crazy story. Piper has a teaching series that he did years ago about him. Judson’s story is insane. Judson is determined to go to the nations in the early 1800s or 1810s. He’s determined to go but he hits roadblock, after roadblock, after roadblock. He finally goes and he wants to go to India. So, he goes to India and he brings his new wife along. They get to India and they realize they are not needed in India because there is already a missionary there. That’s pretty awesome. That guy’s name was Carey[[4]](#footnote-4). Maybe you’ve heard of him. So, they end up going to modern day Myanmar, which was Burma, and eventually, throughout the next thirty or forty years, he buried two wives and six or seven of his children. His wife dies and he remarries and they bury six or seven children. He was there for seven years in Burma before their first convert. Judson then translated the Scripture into Burmese that is to this day—if you pick up a Burmese Bible and look at it—it’s Judson’s translation. Judson was determined to go to India and the Gospel came to Burma because of his faithfulness.

And all of us could probably sit down and think hard—maybe it was a person you thought you were supposed to marry and God said, “No.” You had felt led but God said, “No.”

I have boys come to me and say, “Brody, I feel led to pursue this girl.”

I say, “Okay, that’s enough. Get a job and then come back and talk to me. Marriage is expensive.”

“Brody, I feel led to pursue this girl.”

“How old are you, son?”

“Nineteen.”

“Who pays for your insurance?”

“My mom.”

“Who’s paying for your education?”

“My mom and the United States government.”

“You know what? You are not ready to pursue this girl. There are a few things you need to do and we can help you do that. We will coach you as your pastors and we will walk you through that. But there are steps you need to take and God will use those steps to get you ready for the next step.”

Amen? There are going to be those times in the life of a believer and there are also going to be times in a believer’s life where you look back to your time before knowing Jesus and you realize, “Oh, my goodness. I was not a Christian but God was preparing me for this season of my life as a believer.” I love that. I love that. It’s just awesome because God sees the big picture.

And right here, at this point, God is getting ready to bring the Gospel to Europe. Have you guys ever heard of Europe? It’s a pretty big place, and we are getting ready to meet the first European convert, a lady named Lydia, who becomes the first believer, in the first church, in Philippi, which is the first church in Macedonia, which is the first church in Europe, which is the first Christian church in the western world, of which we are a part. This was because God said, “No, guys, you’re not going to that part of Asia. You are going to go over here.” So, they go over here and God says, “No, no, you went too far.” Do you ever feel like that, like God is kind of up there working the puppet strings? But, then, there are those moments where God lets you see things happen and you go, “Oh! It turns out that God knows what He’s doing! This is fantastic.”

So, verse 8,

“So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night…”

And all of the Baptists get nervous when we see the word ‘vision.’ Anybody with a Charismatic background is perfectly comfortable with this passage. And the Methodists don’t know what we are talking about, period. “What is a vision? Do you mean 20/20?” And there are no PCA people here, so I don’t need to make fun of them.

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there…”

What’s Macedonia? Greece. Where is Greece? Europe. It’s European.

“….Standing there, urging him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia’…”

A lot of you have heard the story about our brother in South Asia who was recently baptized when some of our members were over there and were doing that discipleship training this past winter. That guy sat in his apartment for three or four days because God spoke to him in a vision—a dream, or a vision, or whatever you want to call it. God said, “Don’t leave your house,” and so he didn’t leave his house. He was a Muslim and he waited, and that’s a miracle, because salvation is a miracle from front to back.

If you think you got saved because as a little kid you went to church, got confirmed, got sprinkled, got baptized, said a prayer, or checked a box, you are not saved. If you don’t understand the miracle of the Gospel ransoming a dead, spiritually dead person, who was dead in their trespasses and sin, enslaved in sin, bound for Hell, in the bondage of decay—just read your New Testament Bible, look at the bondage that describes a lost person—bondage to decay, blind, dead in sin, enslaved to sin, in the dominion of darkness, a veil over your eyes, deceived. To come out of any of those descriptions you have to be violently rescued, not gently coerced. Salvation is a violent act where death is put to death in the life of a sinner, and God brings us to life. It’s powerful. It’s a powerful, powerful thing.

When Paul has a vision, we should go “Yeah,” because a massive, major movement of God has to happen for a lost person to come to faith. It’s not just some random, coincidental act, is it? That’s why, as we are reading through this, and we are looking at this Philippian work, we’re talking about church planting; and to plant churches and reach the nations takes strategy, and hard work, and spending our money properly, and focusing on the work, and putting together a plan. It takes learning language, learning culture, and adjusting ourselves in terms of the pursuit of whatever education or platform we are going to use in getting to those people. It’s a big deal and it takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of work.

Paul has a vision and in the vision this Macedonian man says, “Come and help us.” He says, “Come over the Macedonia and help us,” and Paul has an epiphanal moment. Have you ever had an epiphany?

“And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

This is that moment when Paul is going, “We tried to go over here and God said, ‘You can’t go.’ Then, we tried to go over there and God said, ‘Nope.’ What are we doing?” Well, sometimes, you just shut up and you wait. You dig into God’s Word, and you spend time in prayer, and you let God speak to you. When is the last time you, as a believer, sat quietly before the Lord? I’m not talking about for minutes. I’m talking about for hours, or maybe days, and said, “God, you have got to give me wisdom. You have got to speak to me.” Because God moves in great ways and we have to wait on it sometimes. We have to seek the Lord and we have to be still before the Lord. You see this with the Prophets of old and you see it with the Apostles. But, we live in this push-button society, where we are like, “We’ve gotta go. We’ve gotta roll. I have an appointment. I’ve got this. I’ve got that,” and we need to ‘Shhhhhh….’ and get still before the Lord.

So, that happens and God speaks.

“Concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

They said, “We were frustrated. We wanted to go here and we wanted to go there. Let’s be quiet and see what God does.” And God gives them a vision. He said for them to go to Macedonia so they go.”

“So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace…”

If you want something really interesting to look at, look on Google images at Samothrace. It’s an island that juts up right in the middle of the Aegean Sea. It’s a five-thousand foot mountain right in the middle of the water. There is actually a culture and society there[[5]](#footnote-5).

“…and the following day to Neapolis…”

So, they go on into the mainland. You can follow their path. The maps in the back of your Bible actually get interesting when you’re reading this stuff. They really do.

“…and from there to Philippi.”

I want you to watch how God’s working. They go past all these other places to get to this one place. Why?

“…which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.”

Historians say that Philippi looked so much like Rome that people who couldn’t go to Rome would go visit Philippi. It looked so much like Rome in the culture and the architecture and the way things were put together. It was so much like Rome that people would go there to visit. It was a huge destination point. If you study it historically, Philippi was a Greek city. In fact, the Phillip that it was named after was Alexander the Great’s father, Phillip of Macedonia. So, you have this Greek culture that meets Roman civilization and it’s a very, very important city.

Now, one thing, before we read this next part, we learn that for a synagogue to exist in a city you needed to have ten Jewish men. Ten Jewish men would form a synagogue. So, any cities where Paul would go and speak in a synagogue, there were at least ten male believers. Now, keep this in mind—in this culture, and it’s like this in a lot of cultures today—a woman could not worship apart from the approval of her father or her husband. She was told who to worship. So, think about this—Christianity is the first idea in history that completely freed women from domineering oppression of government, society, culture, and men. But, I want you to think how in today’s society, how opposing that idea is to what the secular world would tell you. It’s so counter-ideological—the idea that women are most free in Christ. Is that true, Red Oak? Yes, there is no freedom apart from the freedom that we have in Christ. So, here, you have this system where Paul would come into a city, go into a synagogue, and preach in the synagogue, which means there was male leadership.

We know that Jesus had a strong contingency of women on His initial ministry team—solid women. Now, watch this, and again have the confidence of knowing that Christianity put value on women from the beginning. Watch this.

“We remained in this city some days. 13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer…”

So, there was no synagogue. It was Saturday, the Sabbath, and they were looking for a place to go worship, and there was nowhere to worship in the city, because there was no synagogue. This was a Roman colony so there was Roman worship. We know for a fact that there was a lot of pagan worship that went on in the city. There was a lot of pagan ideology. So, they went down to the river. There’s some significance here. Synagogues were always established near water for the purpose of having water for part of the ceremonial cleansing that would take place in a synagogue. So, in a Jewish synagogue, when they would worship there was certain ceremonial cleansing that would take place. Okay? So, they were down by the river and it seems like the team has heard that there is a group of Jewish God-followers who met down by the river. It was probably just a location along the river where they had water and they could meet in a prayer gathering. It was outside the gate,

“…where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.”

So you have this group of women who are there for a prayer meeting. This would have been like a Jewish type of worship service or prayer meeting. Verse 14,

“One who heard us was a woman named Lydia.”

Her name may or may not have been Lydia. She could have been from a place called Lydia and she would have been called the lady of Lydia. That’s literally what this means and she seems to have some sort of status. She was,

“…from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God.”

So, here’s what we know about Lydia. She’s a wealthy, professional person. If you look at the early converts in Philippi, I jotted down some notes about each. Lydia is Asian, she’s wealthy, and she’s a God-fearer. I want you to watch the people who get saved right away in Philippi. You’ve got this Asian woman who is very wealthy. The fact that she sold purple goods—there were two ways that things could be dyed purple. One was from a particular type of snail that had to be extracted from the Mediterranean Sea. It took 12,000 snails to produce 1.4 grams of the purple dye[[6]](#footnote-6). There was also a certain root, called the madder root, that came from the region of Thyratira, and it was equally exhaustive to extract the dye from that root.[[7]](#footnote-7) Royalty would wear purple and nobody else would wear purple because purple dye was so expensive. It was a very lucrative business. So, you have this wealthy woman from Asia. She’s a God-fearer and look what happens to her.

“The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. 15 And after she was baptized…”

So, the Lord opens her heart and she’s baptized. What happened to her? She got saved. She got saved. That’s a pretty big deal.

“And after she was baptized, and her household as well,….”

‘Household’ could mean employees. She could have been a single lady. Some commentators think maybe she was, because of her independence. She could have been married. We don’t know. But, household would not just have meant her children. It would have included employees, servants, and her whole household, as well.

“…She urged us….”

The idea there is that they were hesitant to go, because this was a lady, and just the idea of going into her home made them a little bit nervous.

“…saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us.”

So, then, she urged and prevailed. She was like, “Please, I want to host you.” What’s she talking about? The first house church in Philippi. This is the first church. Lydia opens her home—a wealthy, Asian, business woman opens her home. Now, watch what’s happening. Verse 16,

“As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. 17 She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” 18 And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.”

What happened? There was this slave girl and her owners were making a profit because she was telling people’s fortunes and they were charging people a lot of money for that. Then, she came to faith in Jesus. Paul confronted the demon that was in her and the demon came out and she got saved. So, now you have the second convert. Lydia was Asian and this woman was a native Greek because she was a slave girl, and she was probably poor, and she was really, really spiritually messed up. This would be our cultural equivalent of a drug addict, a prostitute, or a homeless person. So, do you see the contrast between her and Lydia? The first two converts could not have been culturally more different and they were both women. See how the Church is coming together in Philippi? This is a beautiful picture of the unity of the Gospel.

Verse 19,

“But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. 20 And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. 21 They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.”

This backfires on them later, because Paul is a Roman and these guys are accusing them of not being Roman. They are going to have them beaten and later that backfires on them because Paul is actually Roman.

“The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. 23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely.”

This is where you have to stop and get into the scene. Use your imagination. I encourage you to, between now and discipleship group time, to sit and think about this. They are walking in the city and this slave girl comes to faith in Jesus and is free. She is no longer fair game for these guys to make money. So, the way that the Romans would do things in a Roman city or a Roman colony is that they would put two magistrates in charge of the town. If you had a charge against somebody—and this is still the way things happen in a lot of African cultures—you would go straight to the magistrates right them. There was no long process. Due process was due process. You talk about a swift and speedy trial, it was very much so. So, they got them and they took them to the magistrates. They got people in a mob and they took these guys in front of the magistrates. These two magistrates would have been Roman magistrates. Then, there would have been sort of police equivalents called lictors, and these guys would have been Roman, then the magistrates would hand down a sentence and the lictors would carry it out. The sentence was beating with rods and then jail time.

Now, the guy who is over the jail is part and parcel to all of this. To be a jailer in this culture was a very ruthless position. Think about if you have ever read about or seen anything about jails or prisons in difficult parts of the world. They had horrible conditions; not like prisons here where they might have television, exercise, good food, or things that legally protect people who go to jail. They had no rights. So, they are beaten and then they are tied in stocks and this jailer is overseeing them. In fact, for what they’ve been accused of, we know from studying early Roman law that they would have been put in the highest, most maximum security part of the prison.[[8]](#footnote-8) They would have been put in stocks and it says,

“He put them into the inner prison…” –that’s the maximum security section—“…and fastened their feet in the stocks.”

This was an extremely uncomfortable experience[[9]](#footnote-9). Researchers say that prisoners couldn’t sleep and would go days, sometimes, without sleeping, because of the position the stocks would put them in and the pressure it would put on their bone structure. They could not rest, they could not sleep, and they were beaten and bloody, and you could be sure that the man in charge of them was probably a pretty ruthless guy. And he was a government worker; a Roman official.

Now, for a story that is probably familiar to most of us, these guys are both in there at midnight, and Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns to God. One commentator said they were probably praying and singing at midnight because they couldn’t sleep and they were delirious—they were out of their minds in pain and so they just started singing to Jesus.

“…And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. 27 When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.”

Earlier, we have a story where Peter escaped a prison and the jailers were executed for that. There’s another story later where officials were afraid that Paul and some other guys were going to escape so they were going to kill them. It was after a shipwreck and they didn’t want the prisoners to escape so they were going to kill them. Letting a prisoner escape was a capital crime for the jailer.

“But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” 29 And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” 31 And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. 34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.”

Isn’t that a beautiful story of salvation? We need to believe that no one, no one, is outside of God’s power to save. There is a wealthy business woman, a demon-possessed slave girl, and a very important Roman official of the city, and what we have there is the first Philippian church, the first European church. It’s the three charter members of this church and their households.

Paul is writing the letter to the Philippians that we are reading tonight about ten years later. So, go back to Philippians 1:1, where he says,

“To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons,”

The church has grown. They have pastors, they have elders, and they have deacons. The church has grown because the Gospel has spread, and listen—watch this—not only has the church grown numerically, but we know for a fact that the church has grown missionally, because they have gone to work. In fact, listen to this in 2 Corinthians. This church has given sacrificially. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-9, “Encouragement to Give Generously” is the title of this section of Scripture.

“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,”

You see, the difference in Christians and non-Christians is that non-Christians will often live beyond their means and pay for it with debt. But, those of us who are pursuing Christ will live inside of our means, personally, and beyond our means in terms of how we give. That should be a defining characteristic of a true believer. But, oftentimes in the American Church we are shaped and molded by a secular, capitalist mindset that basically says, “What can I get? What can I collect? What can I put back? How big of a house can I build? How nice of a car can I drive?” I’m not speaking against materialism, and we could go back to the week that Mitch Jolly was here preaching the book of James[[10]](#footnote-10)—it was a powerful message on the love of money and it was very convicting. We need to be good stewards but when it comes to finances, what true Christians and what Red Oak members should be known by is by how much we give. Not just how much we give so that someone can get rich, but so that the Gospel can be advanced.

I heard a story this week about a cultic-type church up in Virginia. I forget what it’s called but it was the blah-blah-blah Tabernacle. The pastor I was talking to said he thought it was rumors until they had some people from that church go to his church, get saved, and join his church. He said they sat down and talked with them and he said this is true—that church meets seven nights a week for about three hours a night. All the men wear suits every night, the women wear long dresses and head-coverings, and so it’s a very modest, fundamental type of place. Then, the people who are members of the church then sign over their own paychecks by bank drafts that go straight into the church’s bank account, and then on Fridays they all get an allotment of funds that they then use for groceries, and food, and things like that. So, oftentimes, in the Church, you see distortions of the idea of how we are to give, and cults are formed on one extreme and people are profiting off the Church on another extreme. People tend to get nervous when we start talking about giving and how we spend our money, but here’s the bottom line—we want to give our money so that the Gospel advances, and so that churches are planted, and so that guys who are reaching the nations with the Gospel have what they need to plant churches, and so if we have to give sacrificially that we are willing to do that.

That’s the church at Philippi. That’s what they’re doing. Then, he says in 2 Corinthians 8:3,

“For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— 5 and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. 6 Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. 7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.”

So we know that the Philippian church was very giving. From the onset, from the start, they began to give to the work of the Gospel and the advance of the Church. They gave sacrificially and here the Church in Philippi began to impact the world, particularly the continent of Europe, and the Church will spread, and explode, and Thessalonica, and Berea, and beyond receive the Gospel because of the faithfulness of these people, that start with a wealthy business woman, a demon-possessed, homeless slave, and a brutal punisher of Christians in a Roman jail. That’s where the Church starts.

Should we have faith that God can do great things with Red Oak Church? Should we have faith that God can do great things with the American Church? That we could actually reach the nations? That people groups could disintegrate into the Gospel and the Gospel could impact the world? Yeah, we believe that.

So, here is what we are going to see in this study of Philippians. I’ll give you a few things that are sort of going to be the main ideas. Here are six main points of application that we are going to see stand out over the next few weeks.

Number one—we are going to recognize that the advance of the Gospel will cost us. We are going to consider the cost. Jesus said that nobody builds a building without first figuring out what it is going to cost[[11]](#footnote-11). And as a church, we are committed to seeing the Gospel reach the nations. We are committed to spending our money, our time, our energy, and our resources seeing the Gospel reach the nations. It will be costly but it will be worth it. Because the world needs Jesus and there is no greater call placed on the Church than to make disciples of the nations.

Number two—we will learn that joy is ours in Christ but it must be fought for. Joy must be fought for. Joy is not handed to us in a gift-wrapped package. It is fought for. We fight for joy. We are going to learn about the fight for joy during our study in Philippians. Christ gives us joy. We need more joy but we have to fight for it. We fight for joy and when we are faithful to fight for it, God will be faithful to give it to us.

Number three—we are going to learn about unity. Unity in the Church is made possible by the Holy Spirit but, again, it has to be worked at. It has to be fought for. Paul even addressed specific instances where people were not getting along, so we are going to look at what it is to be unified, as a Church, in the Body of Christ.

Number four—we will learn what a truly giving Church looks like. We will learn from the Philippians what it looks like to really give. They didn’t give out of their abundance—they gave out of their means and beyond, which was sacrificial. We are going to learn about sacrificial giving. We are going to learn that a church the size of Red Oak could make a much further and deeper impact in the world than what we are making, if we will just be faithful and get serious about this.

Number five—we are going to see examples of Gospel partnership. We are going to see what partnerships with churches look like globally and at home.

Number six—we are going to see that our ultimate citizenship is in the ultimate kingdom and that this world is not our home. This world is not our home. We have citizenship in a kingdom that is much greater than the kingdoms of the Earth. We are going to see what that looks like and we need to make this be a positive thing. In other words, we don’t lock ourselves behind the doors of the church and hide and act like a cult. We engage culture. We are light in darkness and we are salt in a saltless world, and we bring to people the hope that exists inside the Church. Because listen, Red Oak, if there is anything that should be said of the Body of Christ it’s that we are a family, we are a kingdom, we are a household of faith where people are cared for. When there is need those needs are met. Love is given. People love each other well because they know how to love and they even know how to not get along when it comes to that. They know how to work through things, and that should be an example and a witness to the world around us. We are going to learn that from the Philippian church. And we are going to learn it because, like Paul says in the first verse,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

All these things are going to happen because of the grace and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ that rested on the Philippian Church. It rested on Paul and Timothy as the senders. Paul was a recipient of God’s grace. Remember the story of Paul’s salvation experience on the Damascus Road? Timothy was a picture of God’s grace when he was brought onto the team in Acts 16. And everyone in the Philippian church could look at their own testimony and say, “Yes, I’m a recipient of God’s grace.” Grace and peace is how this happens, and we, as a church, are the recipients of God’s grace.

And he says,

“…from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,”

And in a Roman world, where only Caesar could be called ‘Lord,’ they boldly proclaimed that there is one Lord and His name is Jesus. And there will come a day when every knee will bow, as Paul will tell us in chapter 2 of this letter, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. So, right at the middle of this letter, what we are going to learn most about is Jesus. We are going see the Gospel. We are going to see the authority of Christ. We are going to see the compassion of Christ. We are going to see the humility of Christ. We are going to see the power of Christ to save and we are going to see the command of Christ to make disciples. We are going to see the gift of Christ’s grace extended to us and we are going to see God change and shape our church and our lives as we study through this amazing letter that is a gift for us to even be able to read. For the glory of God. Amen?

I’ll pray and we will close in a time of reflection and worship through song.

God, I pray that as we prepare our hearts to dig into this little letter that is so heavy and weighty in terms of what it covers. It took me ten minutes to read it at a normal pace. It’s such a short document but it’s such a weighty and authoritative thing. It’s such a powerful message as we unpack all of these different things, Lord. As we look at the central figure of this letter and the person and work of Jesus, help us to get it. Help us to get it, respond to it, and be obedient to it. Thank you for your Word. Thank you for writing it and giving it to us and shaping us by it. Thank you for transcending cultures and time periods in history and bringing such random people from such crazy, different backgrounds together and forming a church, so that in many ways we are the recipients of the work of that church as it spread to the western world. We thank you for what you did in Philippi. Help us to learn from it and respond. In Jesus’ name.

(Rob Conti)

*Exalting Jesus in Philippians: Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary*. Did you get it? I don’t know why I messed it up and couldn’t remember. I got all the words, just in the wrong order. *Exalting Jesus in Philippians: Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary.* This is a really great tool.

I encourage the discipleship groups. There is so much to talk about from this sermon. One of the awesome things about this sermon was being sucked into the past and looking at these real people who Jesus saved. So, I encourage you to spend some time this week in your discipleship groups—if there is somebody whose story you haven’t heard or whose testimony they haven’t gotten to share with the group, it would be an awesome opportunity to say, “This is it. Jesus is still doing the same thing two thousand years later,” as they hear one another’s stories.

I love you, church. Keep praying for Blue and Britt. Lift them up and pray hard for them and their family right now.

This is our doxology tonight from Jude 1:24-25,

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

I love you, church.

July 31, 2016

Philippians 1:3-8

Brody Holloway

These little cards are going to be great for Scripture memorization. They will be really helpful and give us some cohesion as we go through our study. Hopefully, you will study through the book of Philippians on your own. We make this simple for you. In America, we are a very consumer-minded culture, you know. Do you know what I mean when I say that? We show up and we want to know what we are going to receive and what we are going to get out of it. We gauge the product by what we are paying for it. What is my return on my investment—my ROI. If I’m going to invest a little bit of tithe money and an hour and a half on my Sunday, what am I going to get out of the deal? That’s kind of the American mindset and we tend to drag that into the Church. I’m not saying that you do that but it’s a real common mindset in our culture. So, one of the things I hope you will do as we study through books of the Bible, is that I hope you will take them seriously enough to open the Bible and prepare ahead of time by just reading and familiarizing yourself with the passage and maybe even studying through it yourself; taking some notes and writing down questions. We’ve made it super simple with the one main commentary we are going to use[[12]](#footnote-12). It’s not so much a commentary as a study guide. We’ve made the information about that available on the Facebook page where you can find the long title of it. At the end of each chapter it even has questions for discussion. Anyway, we make this really easy, and one of the things I love about that is the cohesion we have in the body of believers that meets and assembles here at Red Oak. So, throughout the week if you are running into people and talking to people you will be on the same page. We are all reading the same thing, which is wonderful.

Then, some of the ladies, I think spearheaded by Miss Forchetti, have put together this memorization plan[[13]](#footnote-13). A lot of the passages and verses we are going to be memorizing are really familiar to you, probably. So, that’s pretty neat. I’m excited about this new book and tonight we are going to really start digging into it. Last week, we looked at the background and what the Church at Philippi was. If you weren’t here last week, I encourage you to listen to that podcast[[14]](#footnote-14). I think it would be really helpful for you.

I did want to say one thing before we get going. Katie Cousins is here. We talk a lot about people who are going into mission fields, and ministry fields, and things like that. I would like to make it a point that I would like to add Katie, who is not officially on our missionary list, because she’s not officially a missionary, but we do see her as someone who has a ministry objective. Katie is playing soccer on the US Under-20 Women’s National Team[[15]](#footnote-15) and she will be playing in the World Cup. Katie really feels strongly compelled to make that a ministry domain and we’ve talked a lot about it. I would like for you to make a note to be in prayer for her. This is going to be a huge few months ahead of her. She’s been here for the last week and a half or so. I want to make it a point to pray for her. This is an elite world of athletics. We are talking about Olympic caliber athletes. So, she is on that Under-20 National Team and they are going to be playing in Papua, New Guinea this fall. So, please pray for her Gospel influence in that domain and in that ministry area. I know she would appreciate it. Many of you have served in a field, whether it was a field of vocation, or the military, or something like that, where you were the only believer and were surrounded by unbelievers. Especially, a lot of us work in the outdoor industry, and in the outdoor industry that tends to be a pretty common thing. Boy, you can really use some prayer support and know that people are thinking about you and praying for you. That goes in line really cool with what we are looking at in tonight’s passage.

Spencer read it earlier and I’m going to read it again. It’s just a few verses. Philippians 1:3-8,

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

That’s our text for tonight and it’s a beautiful text because it’s a text of love, and grace, and gratefulness, and joy experienced between believers. In the first three verses of the text, verses 3-5, Paul really seems to be speaking with a fondness toward Philippian believers.

Now, going back to what we studied last week, to the intro of this thing, where he goes through Macedonia, he goes to the city of Philippi and great things happen, and people come to faith—this letter is written about ten years later. So, in those ten years we know some history of what’s happened. We can read about that in 2 Corinthians 8. But, what they’ve done is they’ve reached their city with the Gospel so their church has grown in that city and they have added to their number. Oftentimes, you will see that the number would be “added to.[[16]](#footnote-16)” This was something that was actually very common in the Early Church. The Gospel was just ripping through cities and regions. People were getting saved and people were coming to faith in Jesus. Paul certainly had heard of and was tracking that experience in Philippi, so there was this fondness. And I can’t help but think that there is this personal nature to the fondness that he feels toward that city.

It’s ten years later. Think about Lydia, the lady who was leading the women’s Bible study there. He came up on them when they were outside of the city wall by the river. Remember, we talked about this; she got them to come into her house and it was the first house church meeting in that city. I wonder what she’s up to now, ten years later. I wonder what she’s up to. Or, the slave girl, who was the second convert in Philippi. The slave girl in Acts 16 who was demon-possessed and a slave—this would be the equivalent of a modern day person who struggled with drug addiction and maybe prostitution in a very, very dark world. In bondage and enslaved to that world, the power of the Gospel shone light into her life and rescued her. Jesus rescued her out of that. For many of you, that’s your personal testimony. There are a lot of people in this church who are former drug addicts, or who were sexually promiscuous, or had multiple relationships, affairs, marriages, pornographic addiction, and things like that, and you have seen the power of the Gospel shape and change your life. That’s the beauty of the Gospel. The Gospel is beautiful, amen, but it is also powerful. We don’t just see the Gospel in the light of its beauty, we see the Gospel in the light of its power. And some days what you need in your life is beauty and some days what you need in your life is power. The Gospel provides both and Paul had witnessed it in their lives. So, he has this fondness of Lydia. He has this fondness in his memory of the slave girl. He has this fondness in his memory of the Philippian jailer.

I just love that scene, because that dude probably put fists and boots to Paul’s head. He beat him and thumped him good. He tied him up in chains, and oversaw him in that solitary confinement, and then he got saved. So, Paul is like, “I remember you with fondness. Well, not all of you. Not every part of our relationship do I fondly remember, because you hit me hard, but I love the fact that Jesus saved you.” Is that not awesome when that happens? When you know somebody in one context, then the Gospel saves them, and they are completely changed. Don’t you love when that happens?

Today, a large number of Red Oak folks met today over at the McSween’s because, as you know, the Gattens are pulling out tomorrow morning. Please pray for the Gattens. It’s Oliver, and Steph, and three extremely insane, obnoxious, rambunctious little boys, in a Suburban, pulling a U-Haul, across these United States of America over the next few days. They will need your prayer. Oliver said, “Man, I flew over here. Why can’t I just fly back?” and Steph was like, “If anybody is flying, I’m flying. You’re not leaving me with this task.” So, they have to drive across the country because they are moving to Montana. God is moving them. So, we were all there together today and I was looking around the room and I was overwhelmed with grace. In looking around the room, there were ten couples there who I have had the joy of standing before them at the marriage altar, watching them enter into a covenant relationship with each other and before the Lord. It was overwhelming. I almost a couple of times thought, “I just need to go for a walk.” Because the longer you serve in ministry, and the longer we do this together, and labor together, here’s what should happen—our joy for one another should increase. It should increase.

Paul loved the Philippians—he loved them good. He didn’t know them that well. He just spent a little time with them, a few worship services, planted the church, and watered, and it grew, and bore fruit. It began to grow, and develop, and cultivated. Then he left and planted a bunch of other churches. The guy was crazy; he was all over the place. He went from there to Thessalonica and from Thessalonica to Berea, just planting churches. Every city was a different experience. The Bible says that after he left Philippi he went to Thessalonica and those people were kind of like me. Some of you are real thinkers and you had to think your way into the Gospel. You took a long process of figuring things out. Not me. When it got me it just got me and I was like, “Duh, okay,” and I followed Jesus. For some of you that’s your story. For some of you, it took weeks, months, or years.

So, Paul left Philippi, with that crazy dynamic of believers, and then he goes to Thessalonica and it says that the Thessalonians just received the Gospel. They were like, “Yeah, sounds good.” It was almost like, if you’ve ever had that experience when you share the Gospel with somebody and they go, “Okay, I’ll do it.” I love a story that Spencer Davis tells about a kid that he sat down with years ago, and basically this kid walked Spencer through the Gospel and said, “I’m going to get saved right now.” When it was all over, he looked at Spencer and said, “Thanks, so much, man, for all you’ve done for me.” Spencer said he just sat there for ten minutes and the Holy Spirit was just working in this kid’s life. He got saved. Because when the Spirit of God comes after you, sometimes it’s just boom, like that.

But, Paul goes from Thessalonica, and he goes to Berea, and when he gets down to Berea it says, “Now, the Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians,[[17]](#footnote-17)” because they listened to Paul’s words, and examined what he was saying, and opened the Scriptures, and studied the Scriptures to make sure if Paul was legit. Did what he was saying make sense according to Scripture? So, Paul was having these crazy experiences city to city, and in Macedonia, which kicked off with Philippi, which had to have a special place in his heart. And it did, and we see it.

The longer we grow as a church, Red Oak, the more fondly we should grow toward each other, even in conflict. Because, we know that there are a couple of places in this book where Paul has to confront things. There is conflict in the Church. The Church isn’t going to be without conflict. If the Church is without conflict then all people are doing is showing up and keeping their mouths shut and going home. But, if we are going to do life, and get along, and make an impact, and reach people who need Jesus—people who are shooting up, and popping pills, and beating their kids—if we are going to reach those people we are going to have to get a plan, which is going to mean that we are going have to come to the table and figure out how we are going to reach our communities with the Gospel, and to do that we are going to have to work through conflict at times. If you came into the Body of Christ thinking that this is great and this is going to be easy, you signed up for the wrong team, because it’s not. Because we are a bunch of selfish individuals who have been shaped and changed by the Gospel, but the Gospel that saved us out of the dominion of darkness and sin can and will continue to shape and change us. Paul knows that. He says it in verse six. He says, “I know God’s going to complete the work in you.”

So, Paul has this overwhelming joy and thanksgiving toward these believers that I think is both beautiful and powerful. It’s awesome for a couple of distinctives in terms of how joy fleshes out in Paul, and in the way he views these people, and how he gives thanks.

The first one is this. He gives thanks for them and he is joyful for them even in the midst of conflict. Sometimes there is conflict. He’s not saying, “I give thanks for you because you are all perfect.” He’s not saying, “I give thanks for you because you treat me right.” He’s not saying, “I have joy in my heart for you because you are nice to my kids.” He’s saying, “I have joy in my heart because of the work in the Gospel in you.” The reason we love other Christians so deeply is because the Gospel has ransomed them, and the Spirit of God is growing them, and we are watching the beauty of grace in their lives. We should love that. We should love to see that. That’s what binds us together. In fact, he says that down in verse 7. He says,

“It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace.”

We are all partakers of the same grace. This is why when you hear the story of a person who has come to faith in Jesus, and it moves you in your heart, and you become overwhelmed with joy, and you can’t really put your finger on why you feel so joyful, it’s because the grace of God in your heart is resonating with the grace of God in their heart. What we need to see in each other’s lives is the grace of God at work, and that is how we will work through conflict. That is how we will work through difficult times. That is how we will grow as a church. We love each other and we love that Jesus loves each other. Right? Make sense? It does to me. It’s not always easy to do it though.

Sometimes, we are like, “I hope he gets what’s coming to him….I love the grace in his life.” It’s a struggle. You’re like, “I want to get him back for what he said or did.” How many times have you been like, “I ain’t going to church because somebody at church made me mad…blah, blah, blah”? or whatever. Yeah, the Church is full of a bunch of knuckleheads that need Jesus. But they got Him so now He’s going to fix them; it’s just going to take Him from now until eternity, and then once we get there it will be done. It’s a long process. Don’t expect to come to church on Sunday and hang out with a bunch of perfect people. If they were perfect people they wouldn’t come to this church because this is not a perfect church. So, Paul gets that. He gets the imperfection of people, the imperfection of the Church, and the imperfection of relationships, but he also gets the perfection of God’s grace. And when you look at the imperfections in people, you can choose to focus on their imperfections or you can choose to focus on the perfection of God’s grace that is at work in them, which Paul says in verse 6, will come to completion one day. One day it will happen. It will be perfect. Husbands and wives are like, “That’ll be awesome.” Well, you won’t be married then, but it’ll be good just the same. It’ll be good just the same. So the first thing that is interesting about his thanksgiving and his joy toward these people is that they are not perfect and there is conflict.

The second thing that is really interesting to me about the joy that Paul has for them is that his joy is coming from him while he’s in a Roman prison. He’s shackled to a Roman guard. He is chafed and bloodied at his wrists and ankles. You guys, just go study Roman prisons and it’s crazy what they did to these guys[[18]](#footnote-18). The prison that it is believed Paul died in was one of the most horrific places known in all of history. They would bind his ankles and bind his wrists, and tie him and lay him face down on a cold floor, where there are rats, and infestation, and diseases. Prisons were so full of diseases—you guys have probably read, some of you who enjoy history, about the prison system in Rome—if it got disease-infested enough they would just flood a prison and kill everybody. They’d wash them out and start all over. It was a horrible place and in the midst of that—Paul was hungry, Paul was thirsty, Paul was lonely, Paul was cold, Paul had been beaten, and Paul hadn’t done anything wrong—Paul understood what Jesus understood, that sometimes you are going to be persecuted for the namesake of Jesus, just because we live in a broken world. And you can choose to focus on yourself, or you could choose to obsess on your bad upbringing or your difficult past, or you can focus on the power of the Gospel that ransoms people. Paul chose to focus on that. So, sitting in the middle of that filth, and abuse, and starvation—he’s dying and his execution could basically be any time—he lived his life and said that in all of this, “What God is doing in your life gives me a joy that is greater than myself.” That’s the way we should love each other. That’s the way we should look at each other. That’s the way we should see the grace of God in each other’s lives. That’s something to work toward isn’t it? That’s something to think about. Say, “I want to see God move and work in this person’s heart and this person’s life. I want to see it in such a powerful way that even when I’m dealing with my own conflict and suffering I want to get out of that and focus on what God’s doing there.” That’s powerful and that’s what the Gospel does. That’s what the Gospel does among believers. That’s why the Bible, over and over, will say things like we have a Spirit that binds us together, a unity, a common bond.

I love one image in Scripture that is painted that is like we are like bricks in a building. I’ll be honest, I’ve never picked up a brick—well, I’ve picked up a lot of bricks, but—I’ve never picked up a brick and gone, “Oh, man, that brick is beautiful. It’s so red. Look at the perfection of the ripples. Those holes are so symmetrical in the middle of that brick. It’s fantastic. What a piece of artwork this brick is.” I’ve never done that. We were living in Uganda and there was this dude right outside of our compound and he was a workhorse. Every day he was mixing mud and making bricks by hand. He was selling those bricks for something like two bricks for a penny. And, I’ve never looked at a brick and thought it was beautiful but I have looked at beautiful brickwork and been blown away by it. Look at that wall. Look at that building. Look at those columns. Have you ever done that? Because when you take a bunch of bricks and put them in the hand of a master mason and he builds something out of them, it is beautiful. And we are like that as a church. We are like that as the Body of Christ. Whatever you bring to the table may just be a lump of clay. You may just be a rectangular brick and you think that there is nothing spectacular or unique about you; if anything, you are chipped and broken. But, when in the hand of a master builder, the Church, the Body of Christ, the Church of Jesus Christ, becomes the dwelling place of unity. The Spirit of God binds us and there is beauty in that. There is a beautiful picture of God’s grace in the construction that takes place. It’s a powerful picture and Paul got that. So, Paul is joyful and thankful even in the middle of conflict within the Church and even though he, himself, personally was in the middle of great suffering.

So, he comes down to this idea in verse 6, that is such a familiar verse, and he says this,

“I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

We have some things to think through here. This is a verse that most of us will quote in a certain context—maybe as we grab hold of eternal security or something like that. I love this doctrine and I love this verse because this is one of the verses that holds up that doctrine. We are going to see in a minute that there is a lot of stuff in Scripture that holds up that doctrine. But here’s where this verse starts—in the middle of this idea of Paul giving thanks. What he’s done up until this point is that he has given thanks that is an immediate gratification to the Lord. So, in other words, in the first three verses we just looked at, Paul is thanking the Lord for what He is doing and has done in the lives of the Philippian believers. So, that’s an immediate giving of thanks, but in verse 6 he’s giving thanks for the ultimate work that God is going to do in them. So, he’s thanking God immediately, like, “Thank you, God, that you’re doing a great work in them. For what you are doing in this church. They’ve grown and it’s awesome. I love seeing what you’ve done,” but also, “Thank you that in each individual life there is an ultimate work that you’re doing.”

Because, see, if we really understand how Christ sees us, He sees us glorified. The Scripture says that those He called He justified. If you are a Christian and you’re saved, it’s because God justified you. He made you right. He gave you Jesus’ righteousness. You came through the blood of the cross and you came out clothed in the white righteousness of Jesus. God did that but now you are going to be entangled with the flesh, and with temptation, and with difficulty over the course of your life, but Jesus knows that there is coming a day when you will be glorified and presented blameless and perfect forever. That’s a good deal. We look forward to that day. So, Paul is saying, I give thanks for what God is doing in these people’s lives. We give thanks for what God is doing in each other’s lives. I give thanks that so-and-so got a new job. I give thanks that so-and-so got married. I give thanks that so-and-so is having a kid. Pray for the Gattens. They are having a kid while they are living in a camper—kid number four. But do we go, “Oh, poor Gattens”? No, we go, “Praise the Lord. New life. New life!” When you’re making babies in the biblical context, you are carrying out a mandate of Scripture, so we rejoice. We rejoice when we see that. Somebody said, “You know what causes that?” I know exactly what causes that. We did it on purpose. It’s a mandate to be fruitful, and multiply, and impact the world with the Gospel legacy that comes out of each home. So, we rejoice in that. We rejoice when we find out somebody’s graduating, especially if they are graduating with honors. I would be thrilled if I found out that I was graduating with honors. I don’t know what that would be like, but that would be cool wouldn’t it. Some of you have experienced that and we rejoice with you. Congratulations. We rejoice when somebody gets a new car. I rejoiced today when I got my second dryer. Our dryer died and we went and saw Odin and he had a seventy-five dollar rebuild for me. With seventy-five bucks the problem was fixed and I rejoiced that I didn’t have to buy a six-hundred dollar Maytag, or Frigidaire, or whatever, you know. There are things we rejoice over. There are things that are ongoing in the life of a believer and that’s good. We should rejoice. But there is this ultimate rejoicing that we can have for each other, recognizing that there is coming a day when you will be exactly like Jesus, and I’m happy for you because of that. I’m rejoicing over that reality. It’s pretty awesome.

But that has a starting point, so it says in verse 6,

“I’m sure of this…”

I know this—I’m confident—I’m sure of it. There’s no guesswork. When a person comes into a relationship with Christ, they don’t have to hope, or cross their fingers, or wonder. This is a confident thing. It’s a surety. So he says,

“I’m sure of this, that He who began a good work in you…”

So, God begins the work. The work of the Gospel in a person’s life—listen—this is doctrinally important—the work of the Gospel in a person’s life begins and is initiated by God. Amen? It’s not initiated by people who are just searching for good and righteousness because we know that everyone is basically good—no—everyone is not basically good. The Bible tells us in Romans 10:3 that nobody is good. Romans 3:12 says that nobody is righteous. Nobody is good. Our throats are like open graves trying to devour those things that will destroy. So, the work of redemption, and the work of regeneration, and the work of making something new from something that was old, and broken, and damaged, is initiated by Christ. The Bible tells us in Ephesians 1 that before the foundation of the Earth, this is what God purposed in His heart—to adopt us as sons and daughters. So, Paul is rejoicing that the work that is going on in the life of the believers in Philippi began in them at the hand of Christ. He began the good work in them. We should rejoice with each other for that truth.

Then he says this,

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you…”

It’s a good work, so what we are recognizing, then, is that anything good in a person comes from Christ. Some of you got saved later in life so you can remember what it was like before you met Jesus. Everything you tried to do you just seemed to be able to mess it up. “I’m gonna try to do right…I’m gonna get things turned around…I’m gonna quit doing this and start doing that…I’m gonna make changes,” but you just get frustrated because you realize you can’t do that. You don’t have the capacity to do that. Did you ever feel like you were in a season of life where everything you touched you just messed it up? “I can’t do anything right”—right, because you cannot. We will ultimately mess up the best gifts in life if we are doing it in our own strength and our own power. So, the “good work” that is ongoing in each believer was started by Christ, continues by Christ, and will be completed by Christ. So, those things in our lives that are good, those things in your life that are good, and in my life that are good—anything that is good in us is good in us because it’s an ongoing work of Jesus. That’s good news, because Jesus is eternal and He’s the same yesterday, today, and forever. So, the work that He is doing in us, we can believe that He’s going to continue doing that work in us.

Paul reminds the Corinthian Church at one point—the Corinthian Church—you talk about jacked up. Those people were out of their minds. They were getting drunk and having sex at church during the worship service. Paul was like, “Let me explain to you how we do this. Not like that.” What was happening, and we talked about this in one of our last sermons in James, was that in the early churches they would form and come to Christ but then they would take these pagan practices and try to worship Jesus in pagan ways. God was sorting it out for them and Paul was one of the instruments that God used to do that. So, Paul was saying to the Corinthians, “Remember, you were bad and then God made you good, and one day He will make you perfect.” That’s simplified.

“And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified…”[[19]](#footnote-19)

And later, he says, “You will be glorified.” That’s good news. The Gospel is something that God begins in us and God’s no quitter. Jesus never quit anything. He never started something and quit it and He never started something and stopped it. Most of us have been guilty of that, but not Jesus. When He starts something He finishes it. I’m really grateful for that because Christ is the sustaining power in the life of the believer and it is a powerful thing for Christ to work in and through a person’s life.

Then, Paul says,

“He will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

We love this doctrine of eternal security and perseverance of the saints. We believe it, we would die for it, and take a bullet for it. But, I think a lot of times we shortchange ourselves on it and we cheapen that doctrine so that it’s not really the biblical doctrine that we love at all. What we do is we exchange it for the idea where we say, “I know that I’m saved and I’m going to stay saved, so I can live however I want to because eventually God is going to take me to Heaven anyway.” That just simply doesn’t line up with what Scripture teaches. Scripture does teach that we will persevere. It does teach that the work of salvation in us is something that God will perfect, but we also see this very difficult, intense balance in Scripture where in Christ we have work to do. So, Christ saves us so that we can then do the work of pursuing Him. It’s a powerful, powerful picture.

God’s Word on this subject says a lot of things. Just to give you a few verses or references:

* The Bible says in Psalm 89:33 that there is a faithfulness that will never be removed[[20]](#footnote-20). That’s God’s faithfulness to us.
* John 3:16 says that we will be given a life that will never end in Christ.[[21]](#footnote-21)
* John 4:14 says that basically that in us He becomes a spring of unending water.[[22]](#footnote-22)
* John 10:28 says we will never be snatched from His hand. He says, “I give you eternal life and no one can snatch you from my hand.”
* Romans 8:29-30 paints a picture of a chain of events that will never be broken, where it says, “Those He called He justified, those He justified He glorified.” So, there’s this unbroken chain of events that happens in a believer’s life.
* 2 Timothy 2:19 says that there’s a foundation that will never be destroyed in our faith.[[23]](#footnote-23)
* Romans 11:29 says that the call of God is irrevocable in our lives.[[24]](#footnote-24)
* 1 Peter 1:4-5 is where I take new converts, especially young people, every time. It says we have an inheritance that will never fade away. It’s kept and reserved in Heaven for us.[[25]](#footnote-25)

But, we need to make sure we understand this, these promises are not for our laziness—they’re for our service. Let me see if I can articulate this. This is very difficult. These promises enable us to work and labor for the sake and cause of the Gospel, without the pressure of thinking that our service will earn God’s favor. So, God saves me and brings me into service and allows me to take part in the work of building the kingdom; so, knowing that He’s the one doing the work, the pressure is off of me to earn His favor. He’s already shown me that by saving me. But now I have this glorious opportunity to work in building the kingdom of God, and loving other people well, and working toward the end that God ultimately plans to bring. So, in other words, God’s work of grace qualifies us to work. We don’t work to be qualified to go to Heaven, or to save ourselves, or to preserve our salvation; we work because what God is doing in us is working out and through us. We know that we will see this again in our study of Philippians. So, it’s a powerful doctrine—the doctrine that once we are saved we have this security that’s given to us.

Paul knows that, ultimately, what this means is that there is going to be an end to each person’s life, and we can rest in the joy in the present and in the hope for the future. No matter what the conflict was, no matter what disease he faced, or the death, or the hardship, or the suffering, or the sin, or the temptation, Paul new that, ultimately, he is going to stand with Jesus, and so were all these believers. We are going to be in this place where relationships are perfect and that’s glorious. From this day until that day God is going to work to bring about completion in each of us. It’s powerful and beautiful.

And Paul really understood the work that was happening in the Philippians, because, remember that we looked at this last week in 2 Corinthians 8, where Paul reminisces, and he’s reminded of the work that was going on in the Philippian church. In 2 Corinthians 8:1, there are five things that he points out—both in 2 Corinthians and in Philippians.

Number one, in terms of Paul’s partnership and fellowship with the Church at Philippi, he was seeing God work and bring completion, and fulfillment, and growth in their lives. See, when you watch God work in another believer’s life, what you will see is that person will change. They change at salvation and that’s radical and intense. That’s crazy seeing that happen, because the Bible says it’s like a dead person coming to life. But then what happens is that you will see that person continually change. It’s miniscule, small change over a long period of time, and then there will be seasons where people just grow like crazy. So, in Paul’s partnership with them he is witnessing this kind of change. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 says this,

“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— 5 and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”

So, Paul says that the partnership served to further the Gospel. So, Paul recognizes that one of the things that had happened in these ten years is that the Philippians had come to know Jesus, and Paul had this partnership with them, and through that partnership the Gospel had been advanced. He also says that in Philippians 1:7.

Secondly, Paul recognizes in Philippians 4:15 that the partnership was exceptional. He says in that verse, “You are the only church that gave like this. You outgave other churches. You gave beyond your means. You were exceptional in your giving to advance the Gospel.”

Thirdly, in 2 Corinthians 8, in the passage we just read, Paul recognized the spontaneity of their giving. When there was a need, boom.

Think back two months ago to when I stepped up here on a Sunday night. I don’t even think I was preaching that night, but I came up afterwards and said, “Hey, congratulations. You guys just bought a $20,000 truck.” Remember that? Some of you remember it and some of you already forgot. That’s fine, too. What we were doing was we were addressing an immediate need for the Berries who are serving in Africa. Sometimes we don’t have time to go to committee. That works great because we don’t have a committee here. So, it works out great in the long run. Oftentimes, in trying to partner with another church, something will come back like this, “Well, we need to discuss it, and then we need to go to the committee that oversees that committee, and then a subcommittee will meet and bring it to that committee….” I’m not being facetious or sarcastic. Okay. “The subcommittee will determine if they are going to bring it to the committee.” Can’t we just have one committee that deals with this? Why do we have to have a sub one? “Well, that’s the way we do things.” So, the subcommittee, which means two people, would bring it to the committee, which would be five or six people, and then they will meet to determine if they are going to bring it to a business meeting. Now, some of you are new believers, and Red Oak is your first church, and you don’t know what I’m talking about. Don’t worry about it, but just know that it can get grumpy in those things. So, there’s a business meeting where everyone comes together and plans stuff out and then they will do things like vote, have a show of hands, or a secret ballot. People will yell at each other sometimes and other times they get along great. You never know what you are going to get in one of those but this whole process takes about six weeks. It’s like of like a bill going to law in Washington, D.C. It’s a very similar process. Well, six weeks from now is too late. We need a truck Thursday. Right? Paul rejoices in the spontaneity of the way the Philippians would give. He’s like, “You know what? When we had a need…..”—2 Corinthians 8, he says,

“For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,…”

There’s no planning in that giving. It’s just like here’s a need and so they give. So he recognizes that. That’s the partnership.

Then, fourthly, they gave as the need demanded, no matter what it took. So, they didn’t look at the need and go, “Well, we wanted to help you, but it turns out that the need is too big and we can’t help you.” They never thought that way. They never thought that way. They said, “We will give what we can. We will give till it hurts. We will give from our abundance but we will also give from our own need. Even if we are in need we will give, and God will do a great work.” They gave no matter what it took.

Then the fifth principle is that this wasn’t a fleeting impulse in the Philippian church. We need to take a page from this. This idea of giving to Paul—this wasn’t a fleeting impulse that had happened once or twice. This was a ten year old church and this had been a lasting principle in that church. They were known for this. In fact, they are even mentioned in Revelation. They are known to be a church that loved the Lord, and loved to give, and loved to see the advance of the Gospel. So, we are starting to say, “Okay, I can see why Paul loved these people so good.” He loved them. He loved what they were about.

So, let’s land the plane. Let’s bring it in. Verses 7-8,

“It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace,…”

But then this,

“Both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.”

What he is saying is, “It doesn’t matter where I go, or where I am, or what’s happening, I know you guys are with me.” You aren’t only excited when a megachurch is blowing up in growth in some city somewhere. Everyone is excited because you are like, “Yeah, that’s one of our guys.” He’s saying, “Right now, I’m sitting in a Roman jail and I’m dying and I’m starving, and you are still with me.” He recognized the consistency of their partnership in relationship. That’s the way we want to love each other. Because there are times when it’s easy to love each other and there are times where it is not so easy to love each other.

“For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

Ultimately, Paul has this sincere longing to see these people. You can imagine what this would be like. I remember just spending a few months out of the country. It wasn’t that long, but I couldn’t wait to see this church. On Sunday nights we would think, “Oh, man, Red Oak is meeting right now.” It would be about noon over there and we would be eating lunch, thinking, “They are starting right now. I long to see them. I look forward to that.” Paul had that kind of longing for these people. He longed to see them and see the work God was doing in them. This was a church that loved each other, and Paul loved them, and we could learn a lot from them. And the ongoing theme is going to be, in all the things they deal with, joy…joy…continual, constant joy. They loved each other, they loved the work of the Gospel, they loved Paul, they loved their pastors, their pastors loved them, and even in the midst of conflict they were always working to encourage each other, lift each other up, love each other well, and be a source of encouragement to one another. So there was this constant, constant advance of the Gospel.

So, Paul’s joy and thanksgiving goes to God for the Philippians. His joy is bolstered by thanksgiving, because when you give thanks it tends to push you to focus on the blessings in your life, and when you are focused on the blessings in your life that will produce joy. That’s biblical but it’s also pretty good common sense. We do this with our kids. You should think about what you have, not what you don’t have. You should think about what you’ve been given, not what’s been taken from you. You could think about what God has ahead and in store rather than what you’ve been through. This is just a matter of saying, “How do I give thanks? Because giving thanks enables me to see God’s blessing to others and God’s blessing to me. And when I see that, I’m happy.” It produces joy. It creates joy. Because the person who doesn’t have joy in light of God’s blessings and goodness has an internal problem, and that needs to be dealt with as sin. God can deal with that, too. So, thanksgiving produces joy because it brings focus on the blessing.

And Paul’s thanks for the Philippians was constant, because he said it was “always”—always—so let’s love each other like that. It’s a good example for how we should love each other, how we should grow as a church, how we should advance the Gospel. Remember the picture where we are bricks, each one of us, and God is building up a dwelling place for the Spirit of God that will impact this world. We are going to impact this world. Are we going to impact it, Red Oak? We are going to see people come to know Jesus on different continents. We are going to see our man over there who is elbow deep every day in the work of the Gospel. We are going to keep sending him what he needs and he’s going to keep reporting beautiful and awesome things about the power of God moving. We are going to keep Blue and Britt in prayer and steadfastly walk them through this season of darkness as they have lost their child. Then, we are going to watch God plant churches in that dark place where they are serving. We are going to see God continually work in Africa through the Echelon team, and the teams that are forming there, and the people we are working with. We are going to hear stories from another place where a team is going to spend the next few months and we are going to continually rejoice over what God’s doing around the world because the Gospel will not fail—in individual lives, and in churches, and in nations—until Christ returns. And it will be awesome[[26]](#footnote-26).

Let’s pray together and worship the Lord in song.

God, I pray that you would help us to see what a beautiful work has begun in each of our lives, what a beautiful work has begun at Red Oak, and what a beautiful work is ongoing. I thank you for the joy that we have in Christ for each other, and for the work of the Gospel, and the growth of the saints. Help us to love each other good. God, a lot of people come here on Sundays and what they need is to know that this is a place that is safe and where they are loved, and where the Gospel will not be peddled but it will also not be compromised. It will be a clear, bold preaching of the Gospel that binds us together in unity as we see that Gospel advance in our lives individually, and as a church, and as a communities, and to the nations.

A lot of people in this church are hurting right now. God, you know the needs. I pray for Roger and the loss that he’s dealing with. I pray for the Berries and the loss they are dealing with. God, we rejoice over new seasons and new life. Sammie and Aaron are getting married. Babies are getting ready to be born. It’s an exciting season and, God, we are constantly reminded that in every season of thanksgiving there are also probably reasons to deal with sorrow and mourning. So, help us as a church to be a safe place for that and a biblical place for that. Help us to grow in love for each other and focus on the mission at hand. In Jesus’ name.

(Rob Conti)

If y’all are around them or want to gather around them, we are going to pray over the Gattens. Shawn is going to lead us in that prayer, so whoever can get there lay hands on them, because that’s what we do.

(Shawn Clark)

Lord, it is with great affection that we come to you in prayer, right now, for Oliver, and Steph, and their boys. Father, right now, I’m so thankful that they will be together[[27]](#footnote-27). It’s something that we’ve prayed for as a body for years now; that you would put them in a position, in a situation, where they could be together. I thank you for that. Father, I pray for Oliver, as a dad and as a husband, that he would continue to just point Steph and his boys to Jesus. Not to himself or any work of his hands but to your son, Jesus, until the last day that he draws breath on this Earth that he would point them to Jesus. And I pray for Steph, Father, that she would continue to build and structure a home that’s welcoming and a home that would be where their boys would be raised with a Gospel presence and a Gospel focus. Father, whoever comes in and out of their home, we pray that this family is Gospel-minded. Father, I pray that you would continue to use Oliver’s job as a platform for your Gospel work, and Father, I pray for the community that you are going to send them to. I know that just talking to Oliver that you’ve already sent them into a church and I pray that you would bring believers around them that would continue to challenge them and encourage them in their faith and in their walk, and Father, no matter how long you would have them in Montana, I pray that you would use the Gatten family. And Father, I thank you so much for the way that you have impacted our lives through their lives, and you are going to continue to do that. We are going to stay in touch and we are going to stay in prayer over them, as I know that they will stay in prayer over us. Father, I pray for safety as they travel. It’s a long way out there and, Father, I know how strenuous it is to travel with young ones, so I pray over that, and I pray you would give them patience, and endurance, and just guard them. I pray that you would place your angels to protect and guide them as they make their way out to Montana. Father, just give them a good time out there. I pray that you would continue to keep them tethered to your Word and focused on your Son, Jesus. Thank you again for the partnership that we do have in the Gospel with their family and we will continue to do so. Father, I love them and I thank you for loving them, and thank you for loving us. I thank you for our church. It’s in Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Goodnight, church. I love y’all.

August 7, 2016

Philippians 1:8-11

Spencer Davis

Hello everybody. Are you guys doing good? Are y’all awake? Good. So, the dynamic of our church has changed a lot from last week to this week. Thank you so much for praying for us as we were working here at Snowbird[[28]](#footnote-28). For those of you who are newcomers to Red Oak, here on this property is a camp, Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters. We just finished ten weeks of summer camp following two weeks of staff training. About four thousand students came through; and me, and Zach, and Rob, and Brody were preaching every day. It was such a cool season and it was cool to see the Lord work through some really crazy situations. You can imagine teenagers opening up and it was an awesome season of ministry. We are ready for a quick little break. A lot of our families are spreading out for vacation this week and a lot of them aren’t here, but they’ll be back next week.

Our theme for the summer was a super important one. I think the Lord just led us to it. Last year, at Snowbird, we focused on the resurrection of Christ, kind of as our theme for the sermons all summer. This year, for our theme, we focused on identity in Christ. The Lord definitely led us to it because we couldn’t have picked a more appropriate topic for where we are at as a society right now. Y’all know our society is going crazy, particularly with identity. Our culture is applauding anybody who says, “I define who I am. I define my identity. Whatever I feel like I am, I get to say who I am. The Bible doesn’t dictate that.” Our culture will say that. They say, “I dictate that.” So, y’all know that our culture is applauding people who will say, “You know what? I’m not a man—I’m a woman.” Our culture will say, “Bravo! You define what you are. You say. You are the god of you.” If someone were to say, “I’m not a woman. I really feel inside that I’m a man,” our culture will say, “Well done. You define your identity.” So, it was so crucial for us this summer to look back into the Word and talk about identity in Christ. Because, for those of us who are Christians that’s the deepest part of us—our identity is found in Christ.

And I truly think that identity in Christ is the theme of Philippians. A lot of times people try to theme out a book of the Bible. You read commentators and they might say, “Well, the theme of Philippians is joy.” I studied it a few years ago and I really think the theme of Philippians is “in Christ.” “In Christ” is all throughout the book. Over, and over, and over, and over again, Paul says, “In Christ *this*,” “In Christ Jesus,” and “In Christ *that.”* It’s Paul’s favorite phrase. He uses it 164 times in all of his writings. “In Christ *this*” and “In Christ *that*.” If you even look at the way that Paul starts the letter of Philippians, in verse 1, he says,

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

He says that this letter is addressed to all the saints, or the holy ones, in Christ—those who are holy because they are in Christ. Paul starts the whole book by talking about identity in Christ.

So, if you have a Bible we are going to be in the book of Philippians. Here at Red Oak we work through books of the Bible. We are in the book of Philippians and we are going to be in verses 8-11 tonight. So, if you have a Bible you can turn there.

But, I wanted to read a letter from \*\*\*[[29]](#footnote-29). I got it Friday night. Those of you who have been here for a while know that we have a connection with a guy who a year ago was the only known believer in his people group. He is way up in the Himalayas and he was the only known believer in his people group, known as the \*\*\* people. As he is a believer, and as he is in Christ, he does what believers do and he shared the Gospel, and now there are fourteen or fifteen believers in that region, which is crazy. They are not all from that people group. So, there are only a handful and a new one came to Christ this summer. There are two guys, \*\*\* and \*\*\*, and they’ve been working with this guy named \*\*\*, up in \*\*\*. So, he sent me this email Friday night at about three in the morning. He said,

“Hello, Spencer. Hope all is good there. Here in \*\*\* we are doing well. I had gone to \*\*\* to meet up with the believers there and it was a great time. Here in \*\*\*, the internet connection is very bad and keeping updated is sometimes very difficult. I went and set up a base in \*\*\*. We rented an apartment in \*\*\* for all the believers to meet and have fellowship. Until now, the believers would meet up at \*\*\*’s place. That’s one of the believers. The space was very small and now we have a bigger space to meet in on the outskirt of \*\*\*. It was good to meet \*\*\*, too.”

That’s a guy they are trying to share the Gospel with.

“He was happy to meet me and we all prayed for him. Please do keep on upholding him in your prayers. He’s interested, but at the same time he has a fear of what his family will say if they come to know he’s a believer. The rest of the team are doing good. I got a guitar for them so they could use it in the service every time they meet. If the team is coming from Snowbird this year, there won’t be a problem of accommodating you, because we have that space. It will be good, too, to stay with the believers and encourage them. We went to the villages, exploring the far-flung regions, and some villages are very far and there are no roads, and they need to be hiked.”

Now, listen to this part because it really reads a lot like this section of Philippians. Because, the section of Philippians we are in is where Paul is praying for all the believers. He says this,

“We prayed for Snowbird and for Red Oak Church.”

That’s y’all. So, you have a small group of brand new baby believers in the Himalayas who are lifting you up. They are praying for you. It’s crazy.

“We prayed for Snowbird and for Red Oak Church and thanked God for everyone. I shared with them that there were so many people praying for the work in \*\*\*…”

That’s you.

“…and told them, “Don’t lose heart.”

That’s great.

“On the 25th of August, I will leave again for \*\*\*; this time for two weeks. God is working in the hearts of Shiite Muslims here in \*\*\* and the strongholds of the enemy are breaking down.”

This is what sounds so much like Paul.

“In my prayers, I always thank God for Snowbird and for Red Oak, and for standing alongside with me for the work of His kingdom. Together, we will see many come to the Lord. In Him, \*\*\*.”

“In Christ.” There is that identity in Christ. We are bound to these guys because of our identity in Christ. We don’t have much in common with these guys at all. Culturally, we hardly have anything in common with these guys. But, we have in common the deepest part of us, which is that we belong to Christ. Our identity is in Christ. That’s what Philippians is all about and that’s the identity that Paul starts with and that he emphasizes as we are going through the book of Philippians—“In Christ” and “In Christ Jesus.”

Let me read this quote from commentators named Martin and Hawthorne[[30]](#footnote-30). They say,

“For Paul, then, ‘in Christ’ seems to have been the key phrase by which he was able to describe the essence of the Christian life.”

He uses this phrase over and over again. You see it in 1 Corinthians 1:27,

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”

In Romans 1, Paul says,

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”

“In Christ”—that’s our identity. And it’s also what links us to \*\*\* and these guys in the Himalayas. It’s also what links you to you. Because, y’all know, if you are in Christ—I taught a breakout session on the importance of the Church this summer at Snowbird—and one of the things that I kept thinking about over and over is that if you are in Christ you are not just joined to Jesus, you are joined to one another. And the Bible gives us so many illustrations about that, to say that you guys over here are joined to you guys over here, even though you might not have met, if you are in Christ. Right? Together we are one people. We are one building; like bricks built together. Bricks, by themselves, aren’t useful for anything, but built together as a building they are beautiful, and strong, and useful. We live in an illustration. We live in a body. That tells us that we belong to one another because we are connected to the Head—we are connected to Christ. When you think about our belonging to one another, it’s beautiful because of Christ. Psalm 133:1 says,

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!”

It’s only good or pleasant because Christ is there, right? Because there are so many groups of people in our culture that people try to attempt community. They try to attempt brotherhood because they know we are supposed to join together, so they will join together around something weird, like CrossFit. That CrossFit community is crazy. I love CrossFit—it’s great—but the community is sometimes weird because people are trying to join together with a commonality of fitness and nutrition. That’s it—moving, and sweating, and eating things. That’s their community. But, think, there are all kinds of communities based on common interests, whether it’s like paddling, or climbing, or gymnastics, or a certain sport. There are groups that bind themselves together by, not just commonalities but by laws. There are things like gangs, or Masons, or Rotary, or frats—all kinds of people bind themselves by laws because they are not bound by identity. But we are bound by something so much deeper than laws. No work or law could accomplish what Christ has done. He’s bound us together in Christ.

So, now, when Paul is praying, he’s praying based on this deep, binding-together reality—that we are in Christ together. We are bound by something deeper. We are bound by something deeper than common interests. We don’t come here and have church because we have a common interest in guitar playing or preaching. We are bound together in Christ.

So, building on this reality, Paul starts his letter with grace, and thanks, and prayers. You know, Paul doesn’t even instruct in this letter until verse 27. In the first 26 verses, he’s just, “Thank you. I love you guys. I’m so thankful for you. Always, for all of you guys, in all my prayers, I give thanks to Christ Jesus.” He’s “all…all…all” and he’s just pouring out, “Thank you….thank you….thank you.” So, we go down in this prayer, and we get down to verse 8, and that’s where we will start tonight. Philippians 1:8,

“For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

Now, the way he starts this out is pretty strange. For us, you’ve probably heard people say this a lot, “God is my witness.” Right? You’ve heard that phrase? They are telling you a story and they are like, “In case you don’t believe me, God is my witness.” People say that familiarity breeds unfamiliarity. We have used the phrases so much, like, “I swear to God” or “God is my witness,” that they now only mean something like, “I mean it,” or “I promise.” But, think about who is writing this letter. Paul was a Pharisee. Do you think that he casually throws out the name of Yahweh? When this man was writing the name of Yahweh, he would stop and walk over and wash his hands and come back before he penned the four non-vowel letters of Yahweh[[31]](#footnote-31). Then, he would stop and wash his hands again before he continued. This is not a man who would flippantly say, “God is my witness,” or “Swear to God, guys.” He knows what he’s doing. This is a sacred oath and the oath he uses here is pretty rare in Scripture. They don’t use oaths like this. It’s not something he would casually throw out and it’s not a practice that would usually happen. So, this should be like a heads up or a spotlight, when Paul says, “Yahweh as my witness.” When a Pharisee says this, “With Yahweh as my witness….,” it’s like, “Heads up. Listen to what I’m about to say.” He’s making a sincere, deep oath.

Now, this could have been because the Philippians might have doubted his sincerity. Some of them have heard that, “Isn’t this the guy who takes people to prison? Isn’t this the guy that stones people?” So, he might be appealing to that, but I really think that he’s using the deepest, most sincere, most meaningful, most true description of the intensity of love that he has for these people. He says,

“For God is my witness, how I yearn for you…”

It’s “I long for you….” It’s a really intense longing. This phrase is only used nine times in the New Testament and seven of those it’s used by Paul. It’s an intense longing. He says, “God is my witness, I long for you…I yearn for you.” Then, this is weird,

“…with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

Whenever you read the Scripture, no word is in there by accident. Paul does this a lot, where he will say, “I yearn for you with… (something else).” Like in verse two where he said this,

“To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace….”

And you think he’s going to say “from me” but he says,

“Grace to you and peace from God.”

How can Paul speak for God? “Grace and peace aren’t coming from me; they are coming from God and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” Then, here he says, “I long for you. I feel for you. I yearn for you with the affection of Jesus Christ.”

How weird would it be if I said, “Hey, guys, I love you so much with all of Josh’s love. I do. With all of Josh’s love. I love you with all of Josh’s love”? That would be strange, right? But what Paul is doing here is kind of arguing from this position of being in Christ. The word for the “affection” of Christ is something way deeper.

Some of you may have heard—my family is not here, by the way, so I can tell this story. Last week, Knox, my beautiful, wonderful, middle daughter, was playing some sort of game with Jed, my son, and she swallowed a nail. It was about an inch-and-a-half, almost two inch, finishing nail, without much of a head on the nail. I don’t know what kind of game it was. Maybe it was “guess what I have in my mouth” or “where’d the nail go”—it was just one of the games kids will play. Anyway, so she put this nail in her mouth and headed downstairs to go play whatever game it was with Jed, and by the time she made it downstairs she had swallowed the nail. Well, she went in to Amy, my wife, and said, “Mama, I swallowed a needle.” Amy was like, “What!?,” and she called me. I said, “Swallowed a needle!?” So, what we basically did was I called Jason Derreberry[[32]](#footnote-32) and he said, “Tell her to eat a ton of bread and take her to the hospital.”

So, I gave her a loaf of bread and we took her to the hospital. She was in the back of the car trying to shove down all this white bread. Then, we got her to Murphy Medical and they said she needed more definitive medical care. So, they called in a helicopter from Erlanger, in Chattanooga, and they brought over a helicopter and picked Knox up and flew her to Chattanooga. Amy flew in the helicopter with Knox, and I packed a bag and I was driving over to Chattanooga, and I got there right about the time they were about to put her under. They put her on this medicine and Knox just laughed for about twenty minutes then she went under. Basically, they were trying to decide—this is terrifying—should they let the nail just run its course? I thought, “No!” But, they said, “You’d be surprised what can run its course.” They said open safety pins can run their course. I thought, “What?!” But they said it could take up to two weeks. So, they did an x-ray and that’s how we knew it wasn’t a needle but it was a nail, and on the x-ray the nail was right here, above her stomach. So, the guy said, “I can get it in five minutes. I can go down there with these little grabbers, go in her mouth, and grab it in five minutes.” He said, “You want me to do that?” and I said, “Yep, let’s do it.”

Well, by the time they got her sedated and wheeled back, the nail had traveled from right here, a five minute journey, to all the way through her belly and into her intestines. So, way down here in her intestines. Still, the guy was really chill and he was like, “We will get that.” So, it’s crazy, but they put her under and wheeled her in, and fifteen minutes later here she comes. She was drugged and super out of it, but they went down there and they showed us pictures the whole way. It was pretty crazy.

They had a camera on this little grabber and they intubated her. They went down her mouth and just started travelling down. They went through her belly and down into her intestines. The guy was like, “Here’s a picture of the inside of her intestines,” and I was like, “For real?” It was this tube and there you see, laying inside this tube was this little nail. Then, he just grabbed it and went whoo-o-o-o-o-p. Again, that’s oversimplification, but he pulled this nail out and handed it to me. I was like, “Whaa--!” It was fantastic. It was crazy that that nail was all the way down. It couldn’t have been in a deeper part. It was all the way down, in her intestines, below her stomach.

Now, when Paul says,

“I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus,”

the literal word is “from the intestines of Christ.” It’s from the bowels, from the viscera, from the deepest part of Jesus. It’s crazy. What Paul is saying is, “This is how much I love you. With the deepest oath imaginable—by Yahweh—I swear that I love you from the deepest part of Christ.” This is deep, deep love that he feels because of the common bond in Christ.

So, we should pause and say, “How deeply do we love one another in Christ?” How deeply do you love the Body? I’m not talking about your family. I’m talking about the people who are sitting in the other chairs in this room. How deeply do you love? It’s important, because John 13 says,

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

How are we to preach the Gospel to Cherokee County, to all the surrounding counties, to the Himalayas, if we don’t love one another well; if we don’t love one another from the deepest part of Christ’s affection? Because Paul has already said, in verse 7, “I have you in my heart.” But now he’s saying that this goes way deeper than “I love you” or “I have you in my heart.” Here, he’s saying the deepest oath imaginable for the deepest love conceivable. It’s crazy. I love you from the deepest part of Christ.

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples.”

To truly love one another—think about how deep does Christ love us? It’s crazy. So, how deep should we love one another? How well should we love one another? To do that, it’s going to take some extreme effort. Because that means that to love one another well we have to know one another well. That means hanging around, getting to know one another, talking, calling one another, texting one another, going over to one another’s houses. This isn’t academia, right? If Red Oak Church just shows up and listens to sermons like we show up and watch movies, we are missing it. We go into movies passively. We go into a movie, buy our popcorn, sit down, watch a movie, come out, and we say, “I liked this part. It was too long, but I liked that part. I didn’t like this but I liked how he wrapped it up.” If we do that coming in here we are totally missing it. We come in, we sit down, we walk out, and we say, “I liked that song. I didn’t really like that one. I liked when he told that story but I didn’t really connect that right there.” Done. That’s it. If that’s all we do we are not being the Church. We are not being a body connected to one another, joined by every joint, equipped, and building everyone up in love. We are not loving one another from the deepest parts of us if we are just showing up and rating it. That’s not the Church. So, Paul is showing us how to love, and if we are in Christ we have this sort of love in us. If we are in Christ, we have this sort of love in us, right? Then, we can love one another deeply.

So, the next thing Paul prays for them is that that their love would grow. And that’s my prayer for you and that’s my prayer for me—because I’m bad at loving people well. That’s our prayer for one another. Paul has already said in verse 3,

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy…”

And then he goes on to say why he is praying. But, he doesn’t tell us what he’s praying until verse 9. So, verse 9 starts, and he says,

“And it is my prayer….”

So, he’s saying, “Here’s what I’ve been praying for you guys.” He has this deep love. “God is my witness. Yahweh is my witness, I love you from the deepest part of Christ,” and here is the prayer that erupts out of this love. If you love one another you should pray for one another. That’s the love that Paul is showing us. If you love one another, this love is erupting in prayer. So,

“It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.”

Here’s my prayer for y’all. Later on he will tell them that here is how that’s accomplished. Paul’s prayer is that their love may grow, and grow, and grow. Love for whom? He doesn’t say. Love for one another, love for your enemies, love for your neighbors, love for God, love for people around you, love for your kids? Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Your love may grow, and build, and abound more and more. Because, it already exists in them, because they are in Christ, right? They are in Christ. This love should abound more. The word means to abound, or to overflow, or to be more than enough, or to be extremely rich. The word is used 39 times in the New Testament and 26 of those are by Paul. It’s the same word that’s used in Romans 5:15, where he says,

“But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.”

The same word is used. He was talking about Christ’s sacrifice and how His love and His sacrifice abounded so much more than Adam’s sin and death. As Adam sinned, Christ’s grace abounded more, flowed more, overflowed more. Paul is praying that they would flow, and gush, and abound more, and more, and more—then he kind of brings it down and says,

“With knowledge and discernment.”

Huh? You are saying that love will grow, and gush, with no boundaries—unlimited love—but here he’s saying that love needs two things. It’s interesting that he kind of slows it down and says, “But what you need is knowledge and discernment.” It’s almost like this love needs to be overflowing and growing, but it needs to be hemmed in by two things—by knowledge and discernment. So, the word for knowledge here isn’t like the more common word for knowledge, but it’s a word for knowledge specifically about God. It’s religious knowledge; knowledge about the Lord.

Why do we need knowledge? Martin and Hawthorne say this,

“Without knowledge, love easily may be misdirected.”

“Without knowledge, love easily may be misdirected.” See that, without a knowledge of God, His Word, or His will, our love can be misdirected or it can attach itself to something inappropriate, or it can attach itself to something appropriate in an inappropriate way. So, if we were guided just by our own feelings, love would shipwreck. It would. If we just loved and we were guided by our own feelings, our love would shipwreck. If we were solely informed by movies on how to love, love would shipwreck. We need knowledge from God to direct this overflowing, abounding love.

He says we need knowledge and the second thing we need is all discernment. Literally, “all discernment,” – a judgment, or broader perception, or insight. This is the only time this word is used in the New Testament, but it’s used a ton in Proverbs. Wisdom, discernment. Basically, Merida says this,

“We need both knowledge and discernment. Knowledge tells us what is right and discernment tells us what is best.”

“Knowledge tells us what is right and discernment tells us what is best.” Discernment carries the idea of testing, like in Romans 12:2, where he says,

“But be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Right? The love is there because we are in Christ and it is growing, and it’s overflowing, and it’s abounding more and more, spilling and gushing, but it needs to be tempered by knowledge and all discernment. Right?

For illustration, we do a lot of swiftwater rescue stuff at Snowbird. A lot of times they are talking about flash flooding in swiftwater rescue and what to do when a flood comes. A couple of scenarios in the first class that I took had to do with flood control channels. We don’t have those around here, but out West, where it’s flatter, they have a lot of flash floods. In L.A. they have a lot of these flood control channels, which are just concrete channels where the floodwater, which would otherwise go and devastate homes, and flood, and spread, and spread all over the county, are directed into these channels. They say that these channels are so slick, and so fast, and so clear of obstructions, that the water can get up to forty-five miles an hour in them. Y’all know that is screaming fast for water. If you think about the Nantahala River[[33]](#footnote-33), it’s tough to judge miles per hour, and that’s not really how rivers are measured, but it’s flowing about six miles an hour. This is moving forty-five miles an hour. That means that the floodwater that would have just spread out and devastated homes, devastating families’ lives, spreading out and causing a stink, causing so much damage everywhere, these flood channels would direct it into a torrent of channeled, directed water, blasting full steam.

That’s what Paul is saying. He’s praying that your love would abound more and more, but that it wouldn’t just flood and devastate, because if our love isn’t directed by knowledge it can shipwreck. It can cause more damage than good. It needs to be tempered with knowledge and discernment so that it can flow directionally in a controlled torrent—a controlled flood in one direction.

I also think about bumper bowling. Have you ever bumper bowled? Do you know what I’m talking about? You know how in bowling you have pins down at the end and you have gutters on the side; but for little kids they put these inflatable things in the gutters so you can never lose? It’s terrible. It’s the Upward basketball of bowling. “Oh, no, gutterball!” …boop…no…. “Oh, no, gutterball!”… boop…no. “I hit all the pins again!!” It’s fantastic. In order to keep the ball in the lane they have the bumpers to guide it. It’s the same thing here. The love is spilling over. It’s conquering. It’s overwhelming just as much as Christ’s sacrifice spilled over, and conquered, and overwhelmed Adam’s sin. But, since love is sometimes haphazard, governed by our fickle feelings, he is saying it needs to be bordered and directed by knowledge and judgment. Knowledge from the Word tells us to love; discernment from the Spirit teaches us the best way to love. It’s channeling the torrent of abounding love into useful application, because sometimes love looks like rebuke, or love looks like discipline, not just gushy feeling. Sometimes it looks like rebuke or discipline.

Verse 10. Now, Paul has said already,

“For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus,”

The deepest oath and the deepest love. My prayer is that your love would abound and overflow more and more, tempered with knowledge and discernment.

“So that…”

Now this isn’t the main goal. It may seem like this is the main goal—so that what happens next is the main goal, but it’s not—it’s still building. Verse 10,

“So that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”

Now, Paul prays that these things would grow and that they would be tempered by knowledge and judgement, so that they can discern, discover, or approve the things that are superior, excellent, real, or good. Now, this applies to loving others but it also applies to life in general. The verse is really similar to Romans 12:2, where it says,

“Don’t be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing…”

“Testing” is a similar word.

“That by testing you might discern what is the will of God. That which is good, and acceptable, and perfect.”

It sounds really similar to this verse.

“So that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”

Approve what is excellent. Value what is really valuable. That’s his prayer; that you wouldn’t waste your time thinking that unvaluable things are valuable. That you wouldn’t put all your stock in these useless things but that your love, growing more and more, and the knowledge and discernment that comes with that flowing love, would cause you to approve what’s excellent, and be able to funnel that love more and more directly. Love abounding, guided by the borders of knowledge and insight, produces a clear view and a right valuing of this temporary life. Christ is all and when He returns, all non-essentials will be seen for what they are. All worthless and vain pursuits will look silly compared to Christ. And that’s what he talks about next.

He says,

“So that you may approve what is excellent,”

Or value the really valuable. That’s His prayer for them.

“And so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”

“The day of Christ” is when Christ returns.

The word for “pure” is a really interesting word. Paul does this a lot—he makes up his own words. Paul will take two different words and squish them together and make it work by making up his own word. The two words that he squishes together here—one of them means ‘of the Sun’ and one of them means ‘to judge.’ This is the word for “pure”—‘of the Sun’ and ‘judge.’ But the word means something like ‘to judge spotless by the pure light of day’ or ‘by the bright light of day.’

James Boice uses this illustration, if any of y’all have read his commentary[[34]](#footnote-34). In ancient times, pottery was a huge industry. All the time, when people do archeological digs they find a lot of pottery. Most of the stuff they find is pretty crude. It is pretty thick pottery because that’s the stuff that lasts. It doesn’t take a lot of skill to make it, but it’s really thick and it’s really sturdy and they find it all over the place. But, people get really excited when they find some really thin, fine pottery, because that took a lot of skill. To get the clay that smooth and that thin without it cracking takes skill. Oftentimes, that’s what would happen. Either before they put it into the fire or during the fire, especially, it would get some sort of crack in it. Not that it would break into pieces, but a lot of times it would have a quick crack show up. An otherwise beautiful vase, or bowl, or whatever would have a crack in it. Some of this pottery was so fine and well-crafted that you could almost see through it. But, so many times they would have to ditch these pots and they would have to throw them away. However, what some dishonest sellers would do is use a kind of clear, wax sealer and patch the crack. That’s pretty dishonest. They would patch the crack, and paint over it all, and you couldn’t tell. You would think it was beautiful, fine pottery, and you wouldn’t know it was cracked until you tried to put something in it—unless, you held it up to the Sun. Then you could see the imperfections in it. So, the word here for “pure” is like being judged pure by the pure light of day. It was judging by the Sun. It was a practice they were familiar with. So, that’s Paul’s prayer here; that their love would grow, with knowledge and discernment, so that they might value the valuable and be judged pure and spotless for the day of Christ, on the last day.

The next word is “blameless,” or without offense, or keeping others or one’s self from stumbling. But here’s the thing—all Christians have flaws. In this room, who is a sinner? Everybody. Everybody, right? All of us have flaws. But, you know, a true Christian doesn’t have habitual, hidden, secret sins that he is loving, and covering, and harboring, and pursuing, and enjoying; not for long, at least. Not for long. And Paul is praying that the Philippian believers would grow and abound in a love that is bordered and directed by knowledge and discernment, so that they can approve the excellent, value the valuable, and be proven to really be in Christ. Because, if they are really in Christ they have His purity. Right? Those of us who are in Christ are not pure because we act pure. We are pure because Christ gave us His purity. We are pure because Christ gave us His innocence. It is not the other way around. It’s not that we did a lot of good things and Jesus was like, “Whew, they are really doing good. Good job. You’ve earned it. You’ve earned the right to be my son.”

I used this illustration this summer. Jed, my son, looks kind of like me. Not a lot, but he looks kind of like me. He looks kind of like me but he really does expressions a lot like me. So, we were out to eat with my parents not too long ago, and my mom told a joke, and Jed raised one eyebrow and said, “Wait, what?” And my mom goes, “Ohh, that’s you! He looks just like you.” What I didn’t do in that moment was go, “Time out! It’s a big moment. Congratulations, Jed, you’ve now earned the right to be my son. You made it. You look like me enough so that now you’ve earned it. You can now be my son.” That would be getting it backwards, right? We are just recognizing what’s already happened. He came from me so he looks like me, right? When we are doing good works, those things aren’t earning salvation, right? The fruit is showing what we really are. That sanctification is a gift from God and it is evidence of who we really are. It’s the sign of salvation, it’s not the cause of salvation, as one pastor said. It’s the sign of it. So, when Paul says, “pure and blameless for the day of Christ,” we are only pure because we have Christ’s purity. We have Christ’s purity, because we are guilty and Christ is not, and He took our guilt and gave us His purity.

Moving on,

“Pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”

That day is going to happen. Jesus will return. All our hope is in that. Jesus will return. He’s coming back. He said this. That’s the work that He started and earlier in this chapter Paul says that Jesus is going to be faithful to complete it. Just like the work that He started in us He is going to be faithful to complete it for the day of Christ. If Jesus has the power to save you, He has the power to keep you, pure and blameless until the day of Christ. That’s our hope. We couldn’t keep ourselves. We couldn’t. He has the power to keep us, “Pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”

The last verse is verse 11,

“Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

“Filled with the fruit”—I don’t know if there are a lot of fruit trees in Philippi. I would say that there have to be some in order for them to get this analogy. When I was in college, during one of our breaks in school I went down to Boca Raton, Florida, where one of my friends lived. When we stepped out of the car, I was like, “What in the world? The air smells good down here. What’s going on?” Because other parts of Florida don’t smell good. My friend’s name was Shawn and I said, “Shawn, why does your yard smell so good?” He pointed out to the back yard and in the back there was a grapefruit tree—just one. It was almost comical because the branches were sagging down to the ground because it had grapefruits all over it. It was awesome; you could climb up the tree, grab a grapefruit, and eat it right there. It was wonderful and that smell filled the whole area.

Here, Paul’s prayer is that they be heavy with fruit. That they be “filled with the fruit of righteousness.” This is a pretty common phrase for right living or conduct that is pleasing to God, not because we made it, right? But, because the next phrase says,

“Filled with the fruit of righteous…”

or right conduct,

“…that comes through Jesus Christ.”

He’s the source, right?

Martin and Hawthorne say,

“Paul makes it clear, however, that this crop of goodness is not self-generated, nor can it be.”

These fruits are by and through Jesus Christ. Here, Paul continues to build on “in Christ…in Christ…in Christ…in Christ.” Purity, right actions, belonging.

John 15:4 says this,

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself,…”

We can’t be good on our own.

“…unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

So, this is, again, continuing on in Paul’s prayer.

“For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ,…”

And here is the point that he’s praying for. Here is the big climax.

“…unto the glory and praise of God.”

That’s why all this has happened. That’s why the Philippians are in Christ—for Christ’s fame, for God’s glory. That’s the point of it all. It’s started by and finished by Christ.

He says this in Romans 11:36,

“For from him and through him and to him are all things.”

All things…all things…all things…including you.

“To whom be glory forever. Amen.”

As the New English Bible puts it, He is the “Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is.” It’s important to realize, man, that God’s glory is the point of all things. God being seen and worshipped for what He really is, is the point of all things. You can see it in a lot of verses in Scripture.

Philippians 2:9-11, like the one we are just reading, says it is to the glory of God the Father.

Isaiah 43:6-7,

“Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth,7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory.”

People were created, not for themselves, but for the glory of God; to see God for what He is and to worship God for what He really is.

Psalm 19:1,

“The heavens declare the glory of God.”

The heavens and the people under it are created for something else other than themselves. We are created for the glory of God—to make God look glorious. Not that He’s lacking, but we are showing God for the glory that He really is.

Isaiah 2:12 & 17,

“The LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up — and it shall be brought low . . . and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.”

Ephesians 1:5-6,

“He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,…”

Why? Why did God save us? Why did He adopt us?

“…according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace.”

God does all things for the sake of His name and His glory. We teach this catechism to our kids, right?”

“Who made us?

“God made us.”

“What else did God make?”

“He made all things.”

“Why did God make you and all things?”

“For His own glory.”

Now, I’ll pause for a second, because a lot of people have a problem with this. A lot of people say that is ego. “I can’t believe He says that. All things and everybody are pointing to Him.” A lot of people will reject God because they will say that this teaching is egocentric. I went through a lot of quotes of guys who thought along these lines. Brad Pitt, the actor, said he turned away from his boyhood faith, “Because God says, ‘You have to say that I'm the best’. . . It seemed to be about ego.” That’s why he’s not a believer—because God said, “You have to say that I’m the best,” and it just seems to him like ego.

C. S. Lewis, before he was a Christian, complained that God’s demand to be praised sounded like “a vain woman who wants compliments.” A guy named Erik Reece, a university professor and author, rejected Jesus, “Because only an egomaniac would demand that we love Him more than we love our parents and children.” A guy named Michael Prowse, a columnist for the London Financial Times, turned away from God because only, “Tyrants, puffed up with pride, crave adulation.”

So, is God an egomaniac? Is God prideful in saying, “All people will bow to me. All attention should be on me”? If He was a human He would be, but that is a different starting point. Humans can’t claim this, right?

So, I’m a basketball fan. Do y’all remember last year when they basically asked LeBron[[35]](#footnote-35), “Man, y’all played really good in this game. Why are you so confident? Are you confident because there is less pressure this year?” And LeBron said, “No. I’m confident because I’m the best player in the world. It’s that simple.” And everybody said, “Man, you can’t say that. Even if you think it you can’t say it out loud. C’mon.” Everybody was in an outrage because a human said it. If it was us saying this it would be ego. But, with God it’s not ego because He is worth it, right? I want to read this:

“With us, if we commanded everyone to worship, it would be laughable. With God, He is the supreme. We should worship him. That is right. All things are right in the world if God is on the throne and all else are turned towards him in worship. This is a God-centered view that we will only understand with the mind of Christ. The mind set on the flesh is flesh-centered. Self-centered – and can’t conceive of a God-centered world – so it hates it. We don’t hate it, though, because it’s true and right. It’s excellent and valuable and we can only see that if we’re in Christ, and through Christ.” And here’s the thing, if God is the all good, the all-satisfying; if He’s the most satisfying being, the most good being, then the most loving thing He could do would be to point us to Him. The most hateful thing He could do would be to point us to us. The most loving thing He could do is point us to Him.”

John Piper says this,

“God is the one being for whom self-exaltation is the most loving act because, in exalting himself, he is exalting for us the one thing that can satisfy us fully and forever. If we exalt ourselves, we are not loving because we distract people from the one Person who can make them happy forever — God. But if God exalts himself, he draws attention to the one Person who can make us happy forever — himself. He is not an egomaniac. He is an infinitely glorious, all-satisfying God, offering us everlasting and supreme joy in himself.”

That’s big. But here’s the confusing point that I pray, as you study through this passage, that the Lord will help us to kind of unpack. That God’s goal is glorification, and that’s right, and that will be the most satisfying thing for us. God’s goal is that everything is pointed to Him, just because that’s right. That’s fitting. The side benefit is that is also the most satisfying thing for us. God isn’t God-centered because that would be best for us, because that would still be man-centered. I hope you take time and unpack that a little bit later. God isn’t God-centered because that’s the best thing that works out for us, because that would still be man-centered, right? But, if God remains God-centered, then the side benefit is that since all things are right that we are then satisfied because all things are right in the world and the orbit is around the Sun where it belongs. But it’s not our satisfaction that God’s actions orbit around.

Just an illustration to help us understand. The other night, we were sitting by the fire late at night and having heavy conversations, and the cicadas were singing all around us. It was awesome. I love that sound. It makes me happy. It makes me think of good summertime. It makes me happy. But that’s not why the cicadas are singing. They are singing glory to God like the rest of creation. But the side benefit is that it makes me happy, and that’s a gift of God. All of creation is pointed to God—glory be to God—and the side benefit is that is the most satisfying, most happy thing for me, right?

Paul prays for the love and righteousness of the Philippians to increase and overflow, that God might be glorified, not only in and to the Philippian community, but that it might be a light to those outside. That God may receive glory and praise. In John 15:8, following the vine and the branches passage, he says,

“By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and prove to be my disciples.”

God is glorified—that is, God is seen and worshipped for what He truly is—when we bear fruit, and that comes from Christ. That’s why God is glorified—because He who began a good work in us is proving himself faithful to complete it, even in the here and now.

Look at the progression:

My prayer is…

* that your love may abound more and more
* with knowledge and all discernment
* so that you may approve what is excellent
* and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ
* filled with the fruit of righteousness
* that comes through Jesus Christ

All of that is --

to the glory and praise of God!!

In this, we join in the chorus of all of creation, crying “Glory to God!”

Let’s pray.

Jesus, I pray that our lives would glorify you. I pray that the way that we love one another would be from the deepest part of you, Jesus. I pray that you would teach us how to love like that. God, I thank you for your Word. I thank you for identity in Christ. We would be lost. I pray that we would not retreat and try to find our identity in something we are good at—sports, or good looks, or athleticism, or whatever—I pray that nobody would find their identity in things that aren’t identity, but that we would find our identity in belonging in you. God, I thank you that you give us purity, you give us blamelessness, because we are in you, and I thank you that you bring glory to yourself, but I also thank you that the side benefit is that is the most satisfying, most loving thing for me, and for these guys—that you are glorified and we are satisfied. We love you, Lord Jesus. We want to worship and glorify you now with our mouths. In your name I pray, Amen.

August 14, 2016

Philippians 1:12-18

Rob Conti

Hey, church. “*The Wondrous Cross*”[[36]](#footnote-36)—that’s so good. Is it not weird, though? We just sang of the wondrous cross and is it not weird that we are worshipping and singing about an instrument of torture and death? How weird, if we stop and think about it, that we are glorying in and we are pausing to worship our Creator and our God for an instrument of absolute agony and excruciating pain. That word ‘excruciating’ was made up and it literally means ‘from the cross.’ What happened was that for the pain and the agony that people experienced on the cross, there was no other word to define what people would observe as people suffered and died that way, so they made up the word ‘excruciating.’ You don’t say it’s excruciating when you stub your toe. ‘Excruciating’ means ‘from the cross’ and we sing about it. We sing about it! “Oh, the wondrous cross” and “how beautiful the cross”—how wonderful and how amazing. Right? That’s because we remember what happened there.

In the letter we are studying, the book of Philippians, there are nine times that Paul references the Gospel. He references the Gospel nine times in this little letter. Pound for pound that’s the most of any book in the Bible that the Gospel is referenced. Paul is so focused on the Gospel, the advance of the Gospel, and the proclamation that this is good news. It’s good news that the Son of God, God himself, became one of us and was nailed, stripped down naked, beaten within inches of His life, and then nailed on a cross to be mocked, to be ridiculed, and to ultimately absorb Hell on Earth for us. That message has to advance and it has to go forward, and it’s good because the Hell that God absorbed there, the Hell that Jesus absorbed there under the mighty hand of His Father, was for our sin. It was for our redemption. Why is it wondrous? – Because that was my cross. That’s what I deserve, eternally – to eternally experience Hell. And Jesus would go there, take my Hell, take my wrath, take my shame, and take my guilt. We sing because we remember that, right? It’s because of the cross that we’ve been set free. We’ve been set free from guilt and shame. We’ve been set free from the power of sin. We no longer live as slaves to it. We’ve been set free from whoever we used to be. That’s not who you are anymore. In Christ you are a new creation, set free from sin and death to worship God, and to love Him, and to live for His glory. It’s a game changer. Right? That changes everything. It should. It should change us to the core of who we are; how we relate to each other, how we see God, how we see the world. That’s why Paul is able to write what he writes in our study tonight. Let’s read it.

Chapter 1 of Philippians, starting in verse 12,

“I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

15 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.”

It’s awesome. Here, Paul is in prison, right? He’s writing this from prison. He expects and he believes that he’s going to be released but he’s not sure. In the weeks to come we will see where he’s going to say, “I don’t know. But, I know this—for me to die is gain. To live is Christ—to die is gain. If they chop off my head now or later, I’ll go be with Jesus. And that’s gain. That’s for my personal gain. To leave this world is for my good, but to stay here is to serve Jesus, which means that I’ll serve you further.” So, in this letter, Paul is saying that what is going on in his suffering and in his persecution—being beaten and all the things that we will see have happened to Paul—he is saying, “Listen, this has all happened for the advance and the purpose of the Gospel.

So, let’s jump into our text. Paul says this,

“I want you to know, brothers….”

Let’s pause here. If you were here last week—I wasn’t but I listened to the podcast. It was an awesome sermon. I hope that the time of fellowship was as good as the sermon was. It was so encouraging and Spencer talked about this affection that Paul had for the Philippians in Christ. Do you remember that? How we should have this love for one another in the body of Christ. We should have this same kind of love for each other that Christ has for us. And it’s the same kind of love that God has for Christ. Kaboom!—that wasn’t my hair leaving, that was my brain exploding. Think about this; the same love that God has for His Son, you and I have been brought into that. In Christ, God loves you the way He loves Jesus. That’s why it says, “in Christ” over, and over, and over, and over again. So that we get it through our head that we are in Jesus. Our identity is in Jesus. God loves me the way He loves Jesus! And Paul is saying that Jesus loves you that way. Remember Spencer talking about “from the bowels of Jesus”[[37]](#footnote-37)? The word is like ‘intestines.’ From the deepest part of who Christ is, He loves you. Paul says that we should love one another that way. That’s why Paul says “brothers,” right? Because Jesus loved us that way. Because He came to rescue us. Because He identified with us, in our sin and our flesh, so that we can identify with Him by becoming a co-heir, by becoming His brother. Because of that we are adopted into the family of God. We are adopted into the family of God and that makes all of us brothers and sisters. This word should be translated as ‘brothers and sisters.’ Don’t grow numb to that. Don’t just read over that.

I try to say it. I call a lot of you brothers in conversation. I’ll say, “See ya, brother.” That may be weird to you but I try to do it on purpose, just for myself, to remind myself of how I should really think about you and feel about you. I don’t say “sister” because that just seems like over the top of awkwardness. “See ya, sister.” I don’t know. I could maybe pull it off with you, “Sister Susie.” I could do it.

But, Paul is about to lay out some heavy things, some very heavy things, and we are about to get the benefit of it. For all of us, we are going to feel the weight of these verses, and Paul just says for us to remember that we are brothers and sisters. We are family and that’s how we should think about one another. That’s how we should treat one another. “How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity.” Paul is coming back to that. In the next couple of weeks, when we get to that at the end of the chapter, where he says, “Y’all need to strive side by side, together, for the advance of the Gospel, and your own progress in the Gospel, and making the Gospel known.” That’s essential. For us, as a church, that’s essential. If we are going to be the church that God has planted Red Oak here to be, if our roots are going to be strong so our branches can go out wide—as Red Oak Church—if we are going to do that, this is how—by our love for one another. We are not going to grow out any farther than that gives us the strength to do—our unity and our striving side by side.

He says,

“I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me …”

…his imprisonment…

“… has really served to advance the gospel.”

So, Paul says, “what has happened to me.” This is from the *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary[[38]](#footnote-38)*. Regarding what Paul is talking about when he says, “what has happened to me,” it says,

“He could be referring to everything that’s taken place from Jerusalem to Rome. This would include a riot, a two-year imprisonment in Caesarea, an appeal to Caesar, the threat on his life, a shipwreck on the way to Rome, his house arrest with restricted freedom, and his impending trial. Whether Paul is speaking of all of these events or just his present situation in Rome, one thing is clear; it has served to advance the gospel.”

So, Paul is saying, “Listen, what you guys are worried about and what you have been praying for me, know this—that this persecution, this suffering, and what is happening here, didn’t catch God by surprise. It is for the advancement of the Gospel.” He says, “I want you to know it…I want you to know it.” And he’s not just saying this like, “When you guys meet together as a church on Sunday, I have a praise report. It’s not like when you are meeting together and you are going around and asking for prayer requests, and I’m going to be the guy saying I have a praise report.” Paul is doing more than that. It’s for that purpose and to that end—that they would praise God and be encouraged—but it’s more than that. He is saying, “I want you to know this” because he is setting us an example. He is setting them an immediate example and for us, two thousand and something years later, this is our example of how we face persecution. It’s how we should think about trials, and how we should think about suffering, and how we should think about whatever circumstance of life we find ourselves in. It is for and to the end of the Gospel advancing.

“I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.”

The irony here is that they put him in prison to shut him up. He got arrested and their goal was for that to be a deterrent. That was the point of prison. The punishment of prison was supposed to be a deterrent, so when bad guys wanted to do bad things they would think, “Is the bad thing worth going to prison for?” They should think, “No, so I won’t do it.” Right? It’s supposed to be a deterrent. But the irony is that it’s become the catalyst to further proclamation of the Gospel, both within the prison, with Paul being guarded by these Roman soldiers, and outside the prison, through Roman believers, Christians in Rome. The whole point of why Paul wanted to be there was for the advancement of the Gospel. He said, “They brought me here. They paid for me to get here. They are feeding me while I’m here.” It’s irony and Paul is worshipping because he is saying that it has all happened for the advance of the Gospel.

So, what can we see here? I think there are five things we can see of what the Lord is doing in Paul and in the example he is setting. Let me read this, first, because I want you to see this, because Paul says it’s for the advance of the Gospel and the progress of the Gospel. That means the Gospel is being proclaimed so that it’s taking ground. It’s unstoppable. Putting an Apostle in prison is not going to stop the Gospel. The Gospel is going to go forward. The gates of Hell can’t prevail against the Gospel. We win. The Gospel is victorious. It’s the power of God, right? This is why Paul said to the Roman Church,

“I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, first for the Jew and also for the Greek.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

It is the power of God and it’s going to go forward. You can’t stop it. It’s invincible. Do you believe that? The point is not that we just get together and say, “Yeah, the Gospel is invincible!”—The point is that we live like the Gospel is invincible. Right? That’s what Paul wants for them and that’s what he wants for us. That’s God’s purpose, here in Philippians, for us. This is the main point. This is the main point of the sermon. The Gospel is invincible. It can’t be stopped, so live like it, so talk to people like it, so treat people like the Gospel is invincible. Listen to what he says about the advance of the Gospel. Later on, he uses the same word; look at verse 25. He’s just got finished saying, “I’m pretty sure I’m going to be released, because that’s better for you. It’s better for you if I stay and keep ministering rather than them cutting off my head and I get to go right to Heaven.” He’s saying that’s better. So, verse 25,

“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.”

Your “progress” is the same word as “advance.” It’s the same Greek word. He’s not just giving this report, saying that what’s happening is that the Gospel is actually going forward and that lost people are getting saved—that’s awesome, that’s essential, that’s why we are here—but he is just as passionate, and we should be just as passionate, about the progress of the Gospel in the Church; like our own progress in the Gospel. In fact, the way that this is going to read is that as we, personally, as Red Oak, collectively, as you and I progress in the Gospel, what the Gospel means in our lives as we submit to it, what will happen is that the Gospel will advance outside of our church. The way I think that the New Testament reads is that those things never happen exclusively. They always happen in harmony. As we are advancing in the Gospel we will advance the Gospel; and as we advance the Gospel we will be advanced in the Gospel. We will progress. We will grow. We will deeper our understanding. We will deepen our love. We will deepen and widen our influence.

So, let me read this. Verse 26,

“…So that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. 27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit,…”

There’s their unity.

“…with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents.”

And not frightened in anything by your opponents.

“This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. 29 For it has been granted to you….”

Listen to what he says.

“29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”

What’s he saying? He’s saying, “I want you to know, brothers…that persecution, and suffering, and trials…what it really does is that it advances the Gospel. So, as that is happening to you, Philippian Church, as that is happening to you….” Who is on the horizon? Nero[[40]](#footnote-40), right? It’s not going to get better but it’s going to get worse. There is going to be persecution, and Paul says, “I want you to know that when that happens that it is for the advance of the Gospel, so stand firm. Be united. You are brothers and sisters, so live like it and act like it. That is going to be essential when the persecution comes, so that you can, day by day, encourage one another to remain faithful and proclaim the Gospel. Because God is going to use your suffering for the Gospel. He’s going to use your trial for the Gospel. He’s going to use persecution as a megaphone for the Gospel. So, we have to stand fast.” That’s not just for them. That wasn’t just for them; it was for us. It is for us.

I was talking to Zach, earlier. Mostly I was listening to Zach, but that’s a good thing to do. He was telling me of the book, *The Insanity of God.[[41]](#footnote-41)* I have personally not read it but I’ve heard it told so many times, and he was pointing this part out to me. This is still happening. This is still real. Right now in China, what is happening is that God is using the prisons to proclaim the Gospel. Christians are going in and more Christians are coming out. It’s awesome. So, this guy, Nik Ripken, went over there and interviewed people in the underground Church. I’m going to read this to you. It’s a little long, and I’m not a great reader, so pay really close attention. He says this,

From the introductions that I had just heard, it seemed that most of the house-church leaders in the room had served at least one three-year prison term for their faith. I had observed the same thing at both of my earlier stops in China. Surprisingly, none of the people who reported on their time in prison seemed particularly resentful about the experience. At the same time, the believers who had not yet been to prison did not seem to be especially fearful about the possibility of someday having to go themselves. It was clear that these Chinese believers were not seeking persecution. However, their attitude about the likelihood of persecution seemed to be an attitude of calm acceptance. The attitude was not so much “if it comes.” The more common attitude was “when it comes.” I was reminded of what the old Russian pastor had said to me earlier. Here, too, it seemed, that “persecution was like the sun coming up in the east.” Virtually every believer who I had met in China had either been to prison for the faith— or they knew someone who had. They were personally aware of many of their spiritual brothers and sisters who had endured persecution and had come out of it with deeper spiritual roots, a more mature faith, and a greater appreciation for fellowship with other believers. They had also come out of the experience with a much stronger relationship with the Lord. One of the house-church leaders actually asked me, “Do you know what prison is for us? It is how we get our theological education. Prison in China is for us like seminary is for training church leaders in your country.” What an insight that was! And it certainly explained a lot about the wisdom that I had seen in Pastor Chang. He had graduated with honors from three of these “seminaries.” I couldn’t help thinking about my own education and training— and how that compared to what was being described to me now.[[42]](#footnote-42)

That’s current. That’s real world. That’s happening. This is not two-thousand years ago. Get the flannelgraph picture out of your head. This is real believers suffering for the Gospel and being in prison for the Gospel. That’s not strange. Please look at me. That is not strange for our brothers and sisters whom we will spend eternity with. That is normal. What’s strange is to live a Christian life never experiencing real hunger. What’s strange is never being attacked for your faith. What’s strange is having a pastor who hasn’t been thrown in prison for proclaiming the Gospel. We are the exception. We’ve been the exception and we cannot—you and I cannot—continue to live like that’s going to continue. I’m not a doomsday guy, but things are changing fast, super fast. And we as this church, this body, need to steel ourselves, galvanize right now, in the way that we unite together and in the way that you and I progress together in the Gospel, so that you and I are together advancing the Gospel, right now, in comfort, in peace time, and with plenty. We need to be doing it right now, so that when the waves of suffering and persecution start crashing against us we will stand the tide and we will be faithful. Maybe it won’t be until it’s our kids’ church, I don’t know. Maybe God sends a huge revival to our country. That would be awesome, wouldn’t it? That would be awesome, but it’s only going to happen if we start advancing the Gospel, though—if we start proclaiming the Gospel fearlessly.

Okay, so back to those five things that persecution does. There are five things that we see persecution doing in the Church.

Number one. All trials, suffering, and persecution have divine, ordained, eternal, Gospel-centered purpose. Paul sees that. He gets that, right? The irony is that when they try to shut him up, all that is done is that it spreads the Gospel in the prison and outside of it. In a minute, he’s going to say that he was “put there”—the word means that he was appointed there. He was destined to be there for the defense of the Gospel. There was no question in Paul’s mind of why he was in this prison in Rome. God wanted him there. He wasn’t fighting against that. He wasn’t bellyaching about it. He accepted it and he embraced what was happening to him, knowing that this was divinely appointed by God for the advance of the Gospel. For Paul, what else is there? For any of us, for any believer, what else is there? What else is there other than to live for the glory of God? What else is there but to live a life that proclaims Jesus no matter what? So, for us, when we face whatever trial, or whatever persecution, whatever suffering, that we would see that first and foremost that our reaction would be that this is from God for the advance of the Gospel. So, I’ll be faithful, I’ll proclaim, and I’ll see how my life, right now, my circumstances can be the biggest stage possible, to reach as many people as possible.

Number two. Our faithfulness in trials, and suffering, and persecution will be used by God to build up and encourage the Church. He says that right here, in verse 14,

“And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

That’s the result of his faithfulness in the midst of suffering persecution—not only is the Gospel advancing but the Church itself is being built up. They are encouraged and are speaking much more boldly of the Gospel.

Number three. It becomes a clear testimony to the world that we serve Christ Jesus. Right? Everyone knows. He says it repeatedly. Everybody knows that his imprisonment is in Christ. He’s not a criminal and this isn’t because he’s a bad guy who has done bad things and it’s not because of politics. It’s because he won’t shut up about this Jew who was crucified. Paul was telling them He came back. In fact, Jesus wasn’t just another victim of crucifixion—He was the wrath-absorbing Son of God who made perfect atonement. He perfectly satisfied God’s wrath toward our sin and He came back to life. In fact, He was God. It becomes clear that we are living for Jesus.

Number four. We should always rejoice in the proclamation and spreading of the Gospel even if others are doing it for wrong motives. We will see that again in a minute. We should always rejoice that the Gospel is going forward. It frees us to do that.

We will come back to number five but I want to go back to verse 13,

“…so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard…”

That seems to be the imperial guard, the Praetorium, an elite group of about nine thousand soldiers that were the guards of Caesar’s household. These guys were better paid and better taken care of, but one of their responsibilities would have been to guard a prisoner such as Paul, where there were threats on every side of him. So, most likely, these guys would have taken shifts being chained to Paul or being in a room with Paul, whether it was one guy or two guys—not all nine thousand at once. Do you see the beautiful irony here? They were like, “You’ve got to stop preaching about Jesus. We are going to put you in prison and we are going to put people here to make sure you don’t get out.” Then, what does Paul do? He tells those people. He preaches the Gospel to them and the Gospel begins to spread through them. In their attempts to stop the Gospel they bring Paul to the political seat of power, the secular seat of power of his day, and the Gospel just blossoms and spreads like crazy, because the people that he is chained to he is telling about Jesus. They are saying, “This guy is not crazy. This guy is not out of his mind. He’s not some political nut. He’s not a bad guy. He hasn’t done anything wrong. He’s just convinced that he met this guy, Jesus, on the road to Damascus, and that he saw this risen Savior, who he used to hate, and who he used to try to kill people for talking about, and now he won’t shut up about Him.” And they hear his testimony and they hear the Gospel, so it’s spreading throughout the whole nine-thousand of them. And then Paul says,

“…and to all the rest…”

And to everybody else. All these officials who would have been somehow tied to Caesar’s household, or to the pending trial that Paul is going to face, are all hearing about Jesus, and about His life, His death, and His resurrection.

It’s easy to put Paul into a kind of other-worldly state, isn’t it? It is for me. It’s easy to think of him as a super-Christian; kind of unattainable. But think, no, this is a dude, a guy, like us, who met Jesus and he just never got over it. Jesus rescued him and he couldn’t help it. But, he needed prayer, and he needed support, and he needed unity. Just look to the left in your Bible in the book of Ephesians. Look at chapter 6 verse 18,

“Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”

Paul is saying, “Pray for me. I’m in chains and I’m bound up in prison. Pray that I would have the words to say at the right time and say it in the right way. Pray that I would be bold and courageous.” Think of the courage that Paul’s displaying here. His life is on the line. Every day he is doing what God had him put there for. He’s telling people about Jesus and he’s telling people who are in a position over him to do whatever they want to do, physically. They can beat him up. They can make his stay there worse. But, the courage that Paul constantly put on display—that power and that courage only comes through him advancing in the Gospel and progressing in the Gospel. He knew he needed these people to be praying for him.

So, verse 14,

“And most of the brothers,…”

…most of them….

“…having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

It’s interesting that the reason why they were bold and fearlessly proclaiming Jesus—this isn’t like, “I might lose my job. I can’t talk about Jesus at work; I’ll get fired.” No, this is like, “I’ll get thrown in prison. My family will disown me. They might kill me in the street.” Right? They were already preaching the Gospel. They were being faithful and being a witness, but Paul is saying that, by his example, they became much more bold. That’s counter-intuitive, right? That goes against the grain. It’s supposed to be a deterrent but it’s being a catalyst. Outside the walls of the prison they are saying, “This is real. This isn’t a game.” Jesus said, “If they hated me they will hate you. If they persecute me they will persecute you. But, don’t worry about that because I’ve overcome the world. Don’t worry about that. Expect that. That will be normal. Know that that means I am using you.” And the brothers see it. They see Paul faithfully proclaiming the Gospel and they see that what happens is that, in his persecution the Gospel is spreading, and they go, “This is real. This isn’t just another religion. This isn’t just getting together on Sundays and hearing a good story. This is real.”

Please look at me. If you tell people about Jesus, people will get saved. If you and I will open our mouths and stop caring about the consequences, and stop caring about what they are going to think about us, and just care that we are faithful to Jesus, and know that no matter what they think, that we know it is the most loving thing we could ever do. If we will just open our mouths and say to somebody who Jesus is, God will save people. God will do it. Because the Gospel is invincible. The Gospel is unstoppable. It’s the power of God to rescue people out of darkness and into light. We have to believe that and we have to live it. Believe it for yourself.

“Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here…”

Again, Paul is sovereignly appointed to be there.

“…for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.”

It’s weird. He says that that has happened while he’s been in prison telling people about Jesus, so that it’s spreading through Caesar’s household, is that not only are people getting saved but Roman believers are being more bold…most of them. Most of them were being more bold, but he says that some of them are doing it out of rivalry and envy. It seems to come out of nowhere in the text. You’re reading through and it’s like, “What?” He says that what they are thinking is that somehow their preaching of the Gospel will afflict him. Somehow this is an attack on Paul. But, then he says that most of them do it out of love and goodwill. They see Paul as their brother and they know—they get it—that he’s been appointed by God to be there. So, they support him, they love him, and they are praying for him. They are going to visit him and take care of him. They are going to proclaim the Gospel knowing that they are like one with Paul in the family of God. But, these other people who have envy, rivalry, and insincerity—who are these guys? Who does that? Who would preach the Gospel thinking that it is somehow hurting somebody else—another preacher? In the words that he uses, the idea is that they see Paul and they want the notoriety. They want people looking at them. They want people quoting them, seeing what they do, and how they delivered a message. They want to be seen as the leader. So, instead of seeing Paul and how he’s being used by God, and seeing the grace of God in Paul’s life, they just want to take away the influence that he has. So, when they talk to somebody they slide in a negative remark about Paul or do something to try to undermine his influence in people’s lives. But Paul says that, even though they are insincere, and they are doing this for perverted, jacked-up motives—you know what they are doing? They’re telling people about Jesus.

So, Paul says,

“What, then?”

He’s like, “That’s great. I rejoice. I praise God that they are telling people about Jesus.” This is different than when you see Paul in something like the passage that Zach read at the beginning of the service from Galatians[[43]](#footnote-43). We know how Paul talks about heretics, right? He goes for the jugular. He doesn’t mess around. He says that if somebody shows up and they preach a different Gospel, let them be cut off, let them be accursed—he says, “Let them go to Hell.” If anybody preaches a different Gospel let them go to Hell. He doesn’t mess around. But, with these guys he doesn’t say that. These guys are Christians, believers, who are preaching Jesus. He says, “I rejoice in that. So, they have it out for me, they don’t like me, they don’t like that I have position.” Whatever it is inside of them—and we are going to see more of it in the coming weeks—we are going to get hammered. Are you looking forward to that? Because, the irony is that the way they feel about Paul, and their selfish ambition where they want the glory that they imagine Paul has, is all imaginary. It’s crazy. All the words he uses show that what these guys think and feel is this whole imaginary world that they have made. Paul says,

“Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking….”

…thinking—or supposing…

“… to afflict me in my imprisonment.”

They think that this is happening. “They think that what they are doing now that I’m in prison, and they are the big guys on the street, and they are now leading the Church, is that they are elevated and I’m knocked down.” But they don’t get it. They don’t get Paul. That’s imaginary, because Paul doesn’t take glory in his position. What does Paul take glory in? Jesus. The Gospel. Making Jesus look good. Exalting the cross of Christ. Preaching Jesus, so that people don’t see Paul but they see Jesus. Paul says that these guys have it all backwards. They have it all wrong. They want that. They want people to see them, and to hear them, and to think about them. Paul says that what they are even after is all imaginary.

“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense…”

…insincerity…falsehood…

“… or in truth, Christ is proclaimed.”

It’s an imaginary world that these guys are living in, but they are believers and they are preaching Jesus, so he rejoices. It is so hard, initially, for me to go there, until I think about how I think sometimes toward other people. Until I remember thoughts that I’ve had and I’m convicted. Can I be honest with you guys? Not that I haven’t been honest to this point, but like, can I continue to be honest with you in a more personal way? I’ve had to ask God to forgive me. I’ve had to say, “I’m sorry. I don’t really think that about him. I don’t really want to think that about him. That’s not true.” Even if it is—even if I see a fault in a brother or a sister—I shouldn’t delight in that and want some weakness to be exposed so that they are somehow torn down so that I can be exalted. In Christ, we should cover that up. Or, if anything, in love we should point it out to that person so that it gets covered. Maybe in our own minds I imagine that person has it out for me, so I’m going to have it out for them. So, we start playing these games in our minds, but we need to realize that I should be seeing this person through the grace and the mercy of the cross, not out of envy or rivalry. The rivalry is imaginary. It’s not there.

Paul’s not competing with them for anything. It’s like Dolphins being in the same division as the Patriots. The Dolphins’ players can say, “Oh, yeah, they are our rival.” The Dolphins are a really bad football team and the Patriots are a really good football team that has won a bunch of Super Bowls. They could say, “They are our rivals. We go against them twice a year,” but you say, “Oh, yeah? How many times have you won the division?” There’s no rivalry there. There’s no competition. And here’s the sad thing; by the example that Paul is setting out by his own life, he is doing what he’s about to tell us to do in chapter two. Have y’all read ahead? In Philippians 2, whose example are we ultimately following? The example of Jesus, who alone is worthy of glory. Right? He alone is worthy of glory. He alone is worthy to be thought about. He alone is worthy to have worship and praise, yet He left all that, and humbled himself to come rescue us out of sin and death. What we’re worthy of is Hell. What we’re worthy of is guilt, and shame, and an eternity of despair. Jesus humbled himself to rescue us out of that and Paul is saying that we need to think like that. Don’t think highly of yourself. Think of others better than yourself. Don’t envy them; love them. Don’t have rivalry with them; serve them. Rejoice in whatever advancement they get. Because, the reality is, these guys aren’t competing with Paul for glory; they’re competing with God for glory. And this isn’t just about preaching, right? It’s not. Most of my struggles aren’t about preaching. I don’t listen to John Piper and think, “Oh, I could do that.” I think, “That’s really good.” Most of my struggle, personally, with this, is just in personal relationships. That’s where I find myself struggling with envy and rivalry. Wanting something that somebody else has or just wanting them to not have it anymore. I somehow want to advance myself, and all that is, whether in preaching, or in relationships, or if it’s in how you view yourself in the type of work that you do, or the way you husband your wife, or that you father or mother your family—however you would compare yourself to somebody else, in order to put them down and lift yourself up, you are not competing with them for glory. Any time you and I try to apprehend glory, it’s vain, it’s empty, and it’s meaningless. We can’t have it. We will see this in chapter two. We weren’t made for glory. We were made to bask in the glory of God. We are not competing with each other. That’s imaginary. Paul says, “Are they telling people about Jesus? Then I will rejoice in that.” That’s how we follow Christ’s example. I’ll rejoice in that. I hold out hope for these guys. Those guys that he is talking about—I hold out hope for them. Hopefully, they read this letter, and they read chapter two, and they compared themselves to Jesus. If He would humble himself to love us and serve us with the Gospel, then how can we not love and serve one another, who have been rescued by the Gospel?

So, number five is the unstoppable advance of the Gospel. The Gospel is advancing and this is what will happen if you embrace whatever circumstance you are in. For us, that’s comfort right now, by and large. There is going to be suffering, illness, death, and tragedy, and trials are coming no matter what country you live in. Right now, we don’t face intense, personal persecution. That’s what I mean by comfort, because we can deal with the other trials and suffering while still in the comfort of America. He says that in whatever circumstance you find yourself in, know that you’ve been placed there. You’ve been destined to be there and appointed to be there for the advance of the Gospel; so that you would advance in it and so that you would advance it. That it would progress and that it would grow. That people would hear it from your lips. The street you live on is not by accident. The people you work with are not by happenstance. God has ordained that you be there for the Gospel and to tell people about Jesus; the people that you run into in the grocery store. But we have to be aware. Our eyes have to be opened.

I was at my brother’s on vacation this past week and their DirecTV was messing up. So, the DirecTV guy comes over and he’s working on stuff, and I’m downstairs studying for this message, and I think that here is a human being who has walked into this house. So, I just started up a conversation. He’s from Togo, Africa, and we were having this pleasant conversation. I was thinking, and I was warming up to sharing the Gospel with him, thinking about what my angle was, and then he was done and he was leaving. I asked myself, “What am I doing?” and I ran him down in the driveway. I was like, “Hold on man!” Here’s my angle and here’s my in to tell him about Jesus…I know Jesus and we speak the same language. We have to build a relationship. So, I said, “Hey, my name’s Rob. Let me tell you about Jesus.” So, I just started talking to him and it was awesome. He was a believer and he just lit up. He saw what I was doing and he said, “My wife’s father is a pastor. We live here now and we are going to a church in Cartersville, Georgia.” It was awesome fellowship with a believer and I said, “Thank you, God!” And I don’t say that to pat myself on the back, because that’s what we should just be. That’s who we should be. It’s not what we should do; it’s who we should be. We should be like, “There is a person…do they know Jesus?” Because Jesus is going to save people. The Gospel can’t be stopped. It’s invincible. It’s the power of God to take people from death and bring them to life. So, we should do it and we should do it persuasively. We should be persuasive with how we share the Gospel.

Can I take that word back? I’m going to attempt to take that word back, because in our language, being persuasive has taken on the connotation of manipulating or coercing, and that’s not what it means. To be persuasive—in the Bible, Paul would say something about six times in Acts, about trying to persuade people with the Gospel. It means that we would intellectually know the Gospel well enough to lay it out. Here it is—this Jesus was prophesied from Scripture. From the Old Testament, He was the promised Messiah. He’s the King, the High Priest, the Prophet. He fulfils all of that. We should be able to lay it out intellectually. Paul could go right to Mars Hill, to the Aeropagus, and proclaim Jesus to those people, but he could also speak it to the Jews from the Old Testament. We should know the beauty of the Gospel. Paul would always share his testimony, right? Every time you see him in Acts, and you see him proclaim the Gospel, his lead-in is, “Hey, this totally changed my life. I used to hate this guy. I used to hate people who believed this, until I met Him.” Show them the beauty of the Gospel and be persuasive. Be urgent. Show the urgency like, “You need to repent and to believe.” We need to detach from just engaging in conversation and having friendly discourse about Jesus, thinking, “Well, God’s sovereign, so if He wants to save this person…” No. Be persuasive. Be urgent. Show them how it makes sense, show them the beauty of the Gospel, and tell them that this is life or death, and this is Heaven or Hell. Persuade them to believe in Jesus.

Back to verse 13,

“…so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest.”

Look at Philippians 4. He is encouraging them by his example. We’ve seen him say, “Brothers, I want you to know what is happening,” and then he gives them this wink at the end of the book. Look what he does in verse 21,

“Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

What’s he doing? He’s saying, “See, Caesar is not Lord, Jesus is.” In the midst of persecution and in the midst of the Roman Empire beginning to crash down on Christianity, Paul is saying, “No, it’s going to progress, it’s going to advance.” No matter what your circumstance, you are put there by God to tell people about Jesus—and Jesus will save people. That’s what He will do. That’s what He will do through us and what He will do through you. The power of the Gospel; the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God; God becoming one of us and entering this world as a human being, to identify with us, and to live the life that you and I were created to live but we haven’t. We fall short. We’re sinful. We don’t live for the glory of God. We fell short. Our first parents blew it and if you or I were there we would have blown it. The payment, the penalty, and the just reward for our sin and rebellion against our Creator is punishment, but God, in His grace, and His mercy, and His love, not only came to live the life that we should have lived but haven’t, He came to die our death in our place. Jesus did that. That’s why we sing about the cross and that’s why we sing about the Gospel. That’s why the cross is so wonderful—because on the cross God the Father saw Jesus the Son as guilty of your sin and my sin, and He treated Him appropriately; as if He were guilty of our sin. God poured out Hell on Earth on Jesus. Jesus satisfied Him and He became the wrath-absorbing sacrifice in our place. It killed Him and Jesus died in our place, but from death He undid the power of death. What would have held you and me forever, because we would have been powerless against its grip—Jesus broke its hand off. It couldn’t hold Jesus. It had no claim on Jesus, because He’s the spotless, righteous, Son of God. He was tempted but He never yielded to it. And He rose again in victory, so that for us, as a believer, as a Christian, you and I can’t die. We can’t die. We will go from this life into eternity and into the presence of God. If you are not a believer and if you are not a Christian, what the Gospel will do is it will set you free. It will set you free from the power of sin and death. It will set you free from selfishness, and envy, and pride. It will set you free from living the lie that this is all about you. It will set you free to be the person that God created you to be. The Gospel will do that, if you cry out in repentance, and faith, and trust in Jesus. He can rescue you. He can save you. The Gospel is all-powerful because it’s empowered by God, by Jesus, by His resurrection.

Pray with me.

Lord God, I love you. I thank you for the opportunity to think about your Word and think about you. God, we stand in awe, that in no matter what circumstance we find ourselves, that the Gospel will go forward. I pray, and I thank you for a church that is passionate about the Gospel. I pray that what would be true would be what was said of the Roman Church; that having seen this, and heard this, and meditated on this truth, that we would just proclaim you much more boldly. That we would do it with less fear and that we would be more obedient. Lord, we’ve been obedient and I pray that you would use Red Oak in this community to reach the lost and the dying. I pray that you would use us to reach people who don’t know you and that you would save them. God, I pray that you would bring people in this room to repentance and faith. Now, for your glory and by your Spirit, that you would give the increase. Lord, we love you and we need you. In Christ’s name, Amen.

(Shawn Clark)

This book continues to challenge me and I continue like I said last week, at the end of the service, to ask, “What are we doing personally with what we are hearing?” I know for me that I don’t always have this mindset of people that I am rubbing shoulders with day-by-day; people I’m passing in the grocery store or people I see as I pump gas; people that I’m just doing life with; people who are sitting in these chairs. I’m not naïve enough to think that everyone in here is following Jesus and that the Gospel is transforming their lives. I’m not that naïve. What am I doing with the Gospel? Is that daily my motivation? Is that what is pushing me? Is that what is motivating you? Is that what you are most passionate about? Do you see people that you are rubbing shoulders with as dead men walking, people with no life in them? Do we see people like that? Because I know that I was once like that. I can remember that. It was eighteen years ago for me that Jesus rescued me. Am I telling people about Him? Is that what I’m most passionate about? Because I know that’s what Paul was most passionate about, because it changed his life and it wrecked him. That’s all that he wanted to tell people about because he knew that our only hope was Jesus. So, for me, as Rob was preaching tonight, all I could think about was Ephesians 2. And that’s what I’m going to leave us with tonight; is us thinking about that.

Ephesians 2:1,

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—“

That was me. That’s all of us.

“…among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Church, go walk in that. Proclaim that.

I’m thankful for y’all and I love y’all. Goodnight.

August 21, 2016

Philippians 1:18b-26

Brody Holloway

“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.”

As believers, if we are going to navigate this life, and do so in high times and low times, good times and painful times, and maintain our faith and our growth in Christ, we need to have assurance. We need to have encouragement, and wisdom, and knowledge of who God is. Those things will sustain us through difficult times.

Most of us can probably think of a time in our life when things were really hard and really bleak. It could have been a financial situation, or it could have been a divorce that you went through, or the sickness of a child, or the loss of a job, but it was a time when you can say, “Okay, in that time and in that season, what I needed…,” and maybe you had it and maybe you didn’t, but now with clarity you can say, “Encouragement and assurance would have been really helpful for me.” Well, Paul tells the Colossians that in your spiritual growth and maturity you can rest on assurance, understanding that God is ultimately going to work things out for the advance of the Gospel, the glory of Christ, and the growth of the kingdom. So, we have that assurance. This life is brief and it is going to have difficulty, but we can be assured and encouraged that as we pray for one another and as we look forward that God is going to do great things.

So, then, Paul says,

“19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.”

So, Paul says that there are a couple of things at work here. One is this idea of intercessory prayer. The other is the idea of the Holy Spirit at work. In fact, he uses the word “help,”—and remember that Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the Helper. So, Paul is saying that, “In my difficult time, the two things that are going to sustain me, are your prayers and the Holy Spirit in me.”

Listen, church, there are people in this church, who right now, the two things that are going to sustain them this week are going to be our prayers for them and the Spirit of God strengthening them. We need to be in tune and intuitive. We need to know what’s going on in each other’s lives. Jesus says that one of the signs of believers is the way they love each other. Believers are going to be known by their love for each other. We are going to be known by our love for God and we are going to be known by our love for each other. We are going to be known by our love for others. The way that we love each other is going to be evidence of our faith, and the way that fleshes itself out is that we pray for each other and we are aware of each other’s needs.

Some of you are not from this mountain area and maybe your family is more open or maybe your family is more closed, but in the mountain culture families are typically pretty closed. I know that when I was growing up folks didn’t talk about their problems with other people. We just didn’t. It was nobody’s business. But it still gets talked about because people gossip and that’s really destructive. Right, teenagers? Y’all go to school and how much of the day is consumed by gossip, and Facebook garbage, and Snapchat garbage, and Twitter garbage, and texting garbage? Garbage in, and garbage in, and garbage out, and garbage out—all day it’s slander and gossip, and slander and gossip. But, as Christians, we can speak life and encouragement into each other. We can have open lives before each other and we can love each other and encourage each other and not slander and gossip about each other. We can be an encouragement to one another. And the Holy Spirit connects us together and then bears witness in us and helps us.

So, Paul is in this jail cell, where he is suffering, and he wants to be faithful. Can you imagine? This is a guy who has been beaten, and suffered starvation, and he’s been shipwrecked. You know, the one time when they wrecked the boat? That water was cold. That alone is enough for some of you to say that is persecution at its worst. It was cold, cold water and Paul was out there floating around on a piece of driftwood. Then, he ended up on an island and he was freezing, and he got bit by a poisonous snake. He has had some bad days in his time. You know, I’ve never had a day when I shipwrecked in cold water and then, finally, miraculously made it to the beach, and then got bitten by a poisonous snake. What was that snake doing there in winter time? Wasn’t he supposed to be hibernating? If you read about that story in Acts 28 you think, “Paul has had some bad days!” He had one day, I think it’s in Acts 14[[44]](#footnote-44), where they beat him in Antioch, or Lystra, or Derbe, on one of his missionary journeys, and they beat him with these sticks—pow, pow, pow—and he was like, “Here we go again.” They beat him, they stoned him, and they threw him out of the city because they thought he was dead. He just laid there crumpled up. Then, finally, he got up, dusted himself off, and he was like, “I am so sick of getting beat up,” but then he just walked on to the next place. He has had some really bad days. He’s had some days when people who were supposed to love him have turned on him. I guarantee you, that hurts worse that sticks and stones, right? That hurts—when people who should love you, and people you trust, turn on you. That’s painful. Paul has experienced that. People who are supposed to be Christians and people who are supposed to be leaders in the Christian Church turned on him. He’s experienced slander and gossip. In fact, he talked about it even in the prison he is in right now. People were doing things facetiously to try to get him punished further while he was in that prison. So, he was facing the Roman guard and he was facing other prisoners who were out to get him. He knows what a bad day looks like. He’s experienced it and he is saying, “I need for you to pray for me and I need the Holy Spirit to sustain me because I’m afraid I’m not going to withstand what’s coming next.”

One of the things that is constant in the growth of a believer is that we can expect these moments where we feel like we are at our breaking point. And the Lord is going to always sustain us. He is not going to let you break. God is not going to break you in a way that ruins your faith or takes away your hope. He might break you to weed out the things in your life that need to be removed but He’s not going to destroy our hope, because He’s the author of our hope. He’s not going to take away our encouragement because He’s the source of our encouragement. He’s not going to take away our faith because He’s the author of our faith and will ultimately perfect and finish our faith[[45]](#footnote-45). So, no matter how bad your day gets, you can trust that the Lord has good for you and not evil[[46]](#footnote-46)—He has good for you and not evil. We live in an evil world, and it’s broken, but we can trust that God’s going to sustain us. So, practically, in verse 19, when Paul is praying this, he is trusting the Lord for vindication.

Now, think about this. They say that if you interview all the prisoners in a prison, the majority of them will tell you that they are not guilty and that they have been wrongly accused and sentenced. But, in Paul’s case, his imprisonment was not based on him being a true criminal but rather on him being a witness for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was wrongly imprisoned in one sense, but in another sense he was a true criminal, because it was illegal to preach any other king or any other god but Caesar, and Paul had broken that law. He did so while knowing the consequences and the repercussions. Sometimes we are going to do that. We need to be law followers in terms of civil law. We need to abide by the laws of the land, but when we are told to not speak out against a certain type of gender issue—like when the day comes and they say, “Red Oak, you cannot preach biblical teaching on sexuality”—y’all come see us in jail, because that is what will have to happen. Because we cannot shrink back from the authority of the Word of God. If there ever came a day when we were in a monarchy or dictatorship like they have in North Korea, which is like what Paul was in the middle of, where to preach any god or king other than the one that is on the physical throne of that land will get you thrown in jail, that is what Paul is talking about. Paul is in prison in a place where Caesar is seen as king and god. So, Paul broke the law, and in one sense deserves to be in prison. But, it’s an injustice that he is there because the law of that land—listen—contradicts the law of God’s Word. That’s the difference. People might say, “Well, I’m not going to follow speed limit laws because they’re stupid,” but those laws don’t contradict the law of God’s Word. What we are talking about here is when Christians are put in a situation where to break the law means you are going to go to prison, but to break the law is necessary in order to be faithful to the Gospel. There are people who legitimately face that in the world today. Paul is facing that, so he is a lawbreaker in that sense.

So, Paul was praying for deliverance, and he was trusting the Lord for it, and he was believing in the prayers of the Philippians. He had actually been in prison in Philippi, so they all knew firsthand what that deliverance looked like. In fact, remember that his imprisonment in Philippi led to the conversion of the jailer, the head guy over the jail, and his family got saved. A bunch of other people got saved, too. That was ten years before this was written so now the Church has flourished because of Paul’s imprisonment in Philippi. So, they understand things in context.

But, Paul does something here that I think is really important for every Christian to recognize. There can only be two outcomes. Either a court decision will lead to his release or a court decision will lead to his execution. Either way he is going to be vindicated. He will either be vindicated in the court of man and be released or he will be sentenced and executed in the court of man and vindicated before the Lord, because he will be in the presence of God instantly. He understands that and he does something that’s really important. Either way he is going to be vindicated and Christ will be honored. Whether in life or in death it’s all about Jesus. So, the prayer that he is asking for is important and genuinely matters. The power of prayer rests on the sovereign power of the Lord to move and act. Paul says that one way or another things are going to work out and he believes that prayer matters in that outcome. In the end, he says that whether he lives or whether he dies things will work out. Christians, we need to believe in, and hope in, and act on a life of prayer. Paul says that in life or in death there is much good—either way.

So, verse 20,

“As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.”

Again, he’s saying, “Listen, I’m pretty freaked out here. This is pretty scary.” He’s basically saying, “Y’all need to be praying for me because I may not get out of here and that means I may die. I’m not going to lie—it scares me to death to think about dying. I mean, if I die I get to be with Jesus and that’s good. I’d love that but it’s scary. I don’t really want to die—I want to live. I’m afraid I won’t be courageous and faithful to take the stand I need to take. Pray for me. Pray hard. I need it. It gives me hope and confidence to know y’all are praying. No matter the outcome, I need prayer. This is going to be tough.” I was kind of writing in my own words what Paul’s request looked like.

I love that we get to see the raw humanity of these people oftentimes in Scripture. You see it with Christ in the garden of Gethsemane[[47]](#footnote-47). When Jesus is in Gethsemane and He’s praying, He’s like, “God, take this cup away from me. I don’t want to go to the cross. Are you kidding me? I have to go up there and get butchered for people’s sin that I didn’t commit. I’m getting ready to go stand before a court and be wrongly accused, and I’m going to keep my mouth shut, and I’m not going to say anything. I could call angels down and end it all but I’m not going to do that. If there’s another way to do this, let’s do it.” And you see in Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane similarities to Paul’s prayer in verse 20. His dilemma, His fear, and His tension—“I’m faithful and I’m scared and I’m not afraid to admit it.”

As Christians, there are times when we don’t have to try to be tough guys. Just admit that it’s scary. We say, “I’m afraid that I’m going to fall back into that addiction…I’m afraid I’m going to fall back into pornography…I’m afraid I’m going to fall back into sexual sin…I’m afraid I’m going to fall back into…” whatever the thing is that you feel dogs you, and haunts you, and traces you, and tracks you. Be aware of your enemies and be aware of your fears. That enables you, then, to recognize your need for dependency on Christ.

See, what this is doing for Paul is—How easy would it be for a guy like Paul to be SuperChristian? It would be really easy. But, he’s recognizing in his own humanity, “I’m scared.” So, it’s pushing him to rely on God’s people and to rely on God’s Spirit to give him the strength that he needs. The bottom line for Paul is that the issues of life and death are not the big idea. Jesus is. Whatever glorifies Jesus most, that’s what Paul is striving for.

Verse 21. We know this verse so well.

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” This is one of those verses that we all know really well. I wrestle with how to preach this verse. Even non-Christians know this verse, so how do I preach this? I thought that we need to understand, for Paul, what it means to say this. It’s easy to say things, sometimes, and not think about what you are saying and not know what you mean by what you are saying. But this verse is something that Paul says and it has a lot of meaning. The greatest reality of life, for Paul, is that Christ had saved him. It literally held every other part of his life in context.

His whole life had been lived in preparation for the rabbinical life. So, when Paul was growing up, he was raised to be a priest in the Jewish faith—a religious person, a pastor, a teacher in the Jewish faith. When he turned and followed Jesus he abandoned that. That was a big deal. Paul was actually like a modern day terrorist in some ways. In the name of his religion he was going around and killing Christians. But Jesus came and saved him. Literally, Jesus blinded him physically and spoke to him audibly, and saved him. So, Paul had this whole crazy life where he was persecuting Jesus and killing Christians, but then God saved him and so now he was following after Jesus. He counted the cost. He used to be the guy who was cutting people’s heads off, and killing them, and throwing them in prison, but now he’s the guy in prison and wondering if his head’s going to get cut off. It was a crazy turn of events but he saw that his whole life was lived in preparation for this. It literally took Jesus blinding him to get through to him, and then he saw everything in his life through the reality of his own salvation. That’s what defined him. He said, “There is one thing that defines me—I once was lost and now I’m found. I was blind but now I see. I was killing Christians. I was a murderer.” Fill your sin in the blank right there. Say, “I was murderer. I was a sex addict. I was an alcoholic. I was a drug addict. I was a whoremonger. I was defiant. I was disobedient. I was ugly. I was raucous. I was whatever.” The bottom line is that, as a Christian, none of those things are any longer descriptive of who you are. Because for me to live is Christ. There is nothing to add to that. That is the defining characteristic of the Christian life. What is Christianity? Christ. What is the Christian life? Jesus. What is the Gospel? Jesus. It’s all about Jesus. It’s not, “Well, you know, I’m an addict.” No, not in Christ you are not. Not in Christ. You are set free from the dominion of sin. You have been brought from the dominion and the domain of darkness into the dominion and the domain of His beloved Son. A kingdom of light. A kingdom that is ruled and reigned by a King who is good and loving, and who has provided citizenship for His people. That’s the good news of the Gospel.

It’s also true that the proclamation of Christ was something that defined Paul constantly in his life. He preached everywhere he went. He is unashamed of the Gospel. Even in his request for prayers, he asked that he would remain bold. In Paul, we have a life lived in a clear proclamation of Jesus. His message is, “To live is Christ.”

My favorite commentator is William Hendricksen. He really is my favorite commentator. He has a set of commentaries that he wrote called *New Testament Commentary*[[48]](#footnote-48). They are out of print. I was gifted them about fifteen years ago and I looked them up for a buddy this week and you can find them used on eBay for $800. I did not realize what I had. I’m thinking about selling them on eBay. I’ll Xerox all the pages and sell them. I might legitimately do that. But, anyway, Hendricksen is my favorite commentator and I go to him often. He is one of two guys who wrote in this commentary series. He says this,

To determine more exactly just what the apostle has in mind when he says, ‘to live is Christ’, parallel Pauline passages must be consulted. It means: to derive one’s strength from Christ in Philippians 4:13, to have the mind and humble disposition of Christ in 2:5-11, to know Christ with the knowledge of Christian experience in 3:3, to be covered by Christ’s righteousness in 3:9, to rejoice in Christ in 3:1 and 4:4, and to live for glory in Christ in 2 Corinthians 5:15. And in Galatians 2:20, to rest one’s faith on Christ and to love him in return for his love.”[[49]](#footnote-49)

Philippians 4:13, everybody knows the Tim Tebow verse, right?

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

It’s not a football verse. Paul was in danger of losing his head. He wasn’t running touchdowns; he was trying to stay alive. It means something different in that context, amen? “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. They might cut my head off but Jesus will give me strength.” That’s different. Okay? It means he derives his strength in that jail, from Christ.

“For me to live is Christ” also meant to have the mind and humble disposition of Jesus. Philippians 2:5-11. Listen to what he says there. We are constantly reading these verses.

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”

Then, he goes and explains what the mind of Christ looks like. It’s one of humility and service. Also, it means to know Christ with the knowledge of Christian experience in Philippians 3:3,

“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—“

So, to know Christ with the knowledge of Christian experience is to live as Christ. It’s also to be covered by Christ’s righteousness in 3:9, where Paul says,

“Be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—“

So, the righteousness that covers me is Christ’s righteousness. That means to live is Christ. So, the fact that Christ’s righteousness is covering me, Christ’s mind is in me. Now watch this—Hendricksen is drawing this picture for us. For me to live is Christ. In this one letter, Paul will say, “I have Christ’s mind…I have His righteousness covering me…I have His glory as my goal…I have His motivation in me…I have His strength sustaining me to navigate the difficulties of life…” You see how he’s starting to paint this picture of what it looks like to live that life in Christ.

To rejoice in Christ in 3:1 and 4:4, where he says,

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”

Now, he is saying—the mind of Christ, the humility of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the driving motivation of Christ, and the joy that is in me comes from Christ. All of this Paul writes from a prison cell. This dude is sitting in prison and says, “I have Jesus’ righteousness…I have His mind…I have His joy…I have His humility…I have His strength…. Cut my head off and see if any of that changes. It will not. When my eyes open again I will be standing before the One in whom I exist and belong. For me to live is Christ and to die---that’s cool, too. Because all of this that I’m receiving in Christ right now is a temporary reality because it’s plagued with a fleshly body and a fleshly mind. But it will become a permanent reality when I’m glorified. And I won’t have temptation, and I won’t doubt, and I won’t fear.” Humility is not an issue. A doubting mind is not an issue. Sin is not an issue. Paul is like, “I can stay here and that’s cool. Christ has given me what I need to be sustained in this life. So, for me to live is Christ.”

Also, additionally, in 2 Corinthians 5:15, he says, to live for and glory in Christ is what defines this life. And, in this verse that we know so well, in Galatians 2:20, Hendricksen says to, “Rest one’s faith on Christ and to love Him in return for His love.” You guys know this verse. It really has to accompany Philippians 1:21. Galatians 2:20,

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

So, I’m crucified with Christ and I die with Christ but that’s not all—I live. But, it’s no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. The best commentary, for me personally, on Philippians 1:21 is Galatians 2:20. I’ll say it again, so I’m dead. At salvation, at conversion, the old you died. Nevertheless I live. I thought you said you were dead. No, I live. But, it’s not me anymore, because I’m a new creation. Nevertheless I live, and it’s no longer I who lives, but Christ who is living in me. The life I now live in the flesh—my physical body—in this life, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

James Boice[[50]](#footnote-50) describes it this way. He breaks it down into three categories. He says that “to live is Christ” can be summed up this way.

Number one. Faith in Christ. So, “to live is Christ” means I have put my faith in Christ at salvation and conversion, but it’s salvation and conversion that continues for the rest of my life. I don’t get saved and just check it off a list. I grew up in the Bible Belt and here’s what happens. “Did you get saved?” “Yeah, when I was thirteen.” “What did that look like?” “I said a prayer, boom, it was done and I’ve lived the rest of my life however I wanted to live it. And somebody told me that means that I get to go to Heaven.” But, the Scriptures say that if you say you are in Christ and you don’t obey the Scripture that you’re a liar. The Scripture says that if you continue in sin and do not do the truth, you do not the truth when you say that you’re a Christian. Faith leads to something greater. That’s why Jesus says to count the cost. Consider the cost of following Jesus. Don’t just say a prayer, and check the box, and fill out a decision card at an event. To follow Christ is that we enter into life in Christ by faith, but then it’s like that faith never stops driving and motivating.

So, Boice says that “to live is Christ” can be summed up as faith in Christ and, secondly, fellowship with Christ. We are no longer enemies of God. We are friends of God because we have fellowship with Jesus. Isn’t fellowship with another person really sweet? But isn’t conflict with another person extremely consuming? Maybe some of you right now are in a situation where you have conflict in your life with another human. It’s especially difficult when that other human is a believer. It’s difficult no matter what. Conflict drains you. It keeps you awake at night. It’s on your brain when you wake up in the morning. “Why can I not resolve this? Why does this person not see things the way I see it, or why do I not see it the way they see it? Why can we not get through this?” And it’s most frustrating when we have conflict, that even when we try to resolve it we can’t get it resolved. “To live is Christ” means that you are not like that with Jesus. You are at peace with God through Jesus. Fellowship with Christ—you will never, in your life, look at Christ and say, “Why can’t I please Him? Why can’t we get along?” Because, if that’s the case, it’s something broken with you. There’s something wrong with you. There’s something going on with you. When there is conflict with other people, sometimes we can’t figure it out, but with Jesus we know, “I’m the problem.” Always, the source of conflict is me. I’m the source of the problem. So, fellowship with Christ is a gift that we receive.

Boice says, “To live is Christ,” can be summed up as faith in Christ, fellowship with Christ, and thirdly, following after Christ. Following after Christ.

I told a story this weekend and this is a little different context than I used the story. We were talking about discipling young people, but I wanted to share it here because it’s really helpful for me in a couple of different contexts. Muggs and I were on a hunting trip in Saskatchewan, Canada, and we were shooting ducks and geese. It was more fun that two humans should be allowed to have in a three hour window of time. I’ve never pulled the trigger so much and I missed so much. I’m a terrible shot at birds. They are moving and they won’t hold still for you. They are not like helicopters; they don’t hover. I can’t even describe the scene to you. It was pure waterfowl carnage and it was glorious. We were shooting those birds and were literally giggling as we were moving out of the way of these three-pound birds that were hitting the ground beside us, and it sounded like a bowling ball hitting the ground. We were like, “Please, God, don’t let one of those things land on top of me.” We were just shooting and having the biggest time.

Well, I never thought about this. I knew how many we could kill. We had a limit of some kind. But, it was cold, and at the end of that day, we were with a friend of his who had an airplane, and we were standing out in front of that airplane on a little runway, about half the size of this one out here in Andrews, freezing cold, and we were cleaning these birds in five-gallon buckets full of birds. If you’ve ever cleaned birds, it’s like cleaning fish or anything else—that’s not the fun part, you know? I remember going to lunch and saying, “Let’s do it again.” There was another kind of bird and we wanted to go shoot them. But it was time to go home that night and we spent a couple of hours with numb hands, cleaning those birds out there beside that airplane. I remember thinking that it was fun but I don’t know if it was that fun. We flew home and I thought, “Yeah, I would go back and do that again.”

So, think back to when you got saved. There is this excitement to be following Jesus but when it starts getting dirty, and cold, and the work sets in, and you have labor in front of you—. Because in the Christian life faith and fellowship are awesome, but when you get to that third point, following after Christ is hard work. That’s discipleship. That’s hard work. When I was in the shower today and I was praying and talking to God, I was like, “God, I want Red Oak to become an evangelistic machine. I want to see people get saved and baptized. I want people to meet Jesus.” Then, I was thinking, “Okay, if that happens we had better be ready for them, because it’s then our job to disciple them.” As a church, it’s our job to disciple the people in this church. We’ve said this before, and we’ve offended people, and people have left over it, but we do not want members who come here, and sit on a pew, and are consumer Christians. Go find another church if you aren’t going to plug in, because we want to be on mission. And all that means is that you are engaging people here, you are a part of the community, and then you are sharing the Gospel with people at your work. I’m not saying that you have to come and be on staff, because we don’t have a staff. We are all volunteers. What I’m talking about is that we need to be like-minded and be on mission in Clay, and Cherokee, and Graham counties. We are engaging people in our workplace and raising our kids in the nurture and admonition of the Lord[[51]](#footnote-51). We are doing things in a godly way. Every area of our lives is imprinted and impacted by Christ because for us to live is Christ. There is no way, in the context of that verse, that you can just go to church for an hour on Sunday and call it Christianity. You’ve been lied to or you are lying to yourself. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain, and if you can’t put those things in the same sentence you don’t have Christianity. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Paul could say it with authority and humility. That’s something to strive for. Following after Christ to his own death would eventually be a reality. Paul didn’t know if this was it, so he said, “To live is Christ.”

Secondly, Paul knew that what awaited him was death and he knew what awaited him in death. To be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord, and Paul had just told us in verse 20 that he had an expectation and hope that Christ would be honored in his death. He longed to be with the Lord.

We don’t tend to grasp this, for several reasons. Mainly, we are not persecuted. No one ever said on the day before his or her wedding, “I really want to get married but I wish Jesus would come back today.” Right, Sammie and Aaron? Can you imagine what a joke Christ would have pulled on you guys if two Sundays ago He blew the trumpet? Aaron would be like, “Just wait. Time out.” When people have something exciting in their lives they aren’t longing for Christ’s return. Do you know what I’m saying? Does that make sense? You just got a big promotion and you are getting ready to make a bunch of money. You have a big deal going down. If you found out that this new job was awaiting you and you were going to make six figures, when you’ve been living on sardines and Vienna sausages, and you were anticipating eating steak every night, and getting a new car, so that you were no longer going to be driving a moped, it was going to be awesome, you’d be like, “Jesus, please don’t come back until I at least get to enjoy a little bit of this.” When we are in an easy season of life we don’t tend to long for Jesus’ return. But, is it not true, if your baby dies you start thinking about Heaven? I guarantee you that Blue and Britt have thought about Heaven a lot lately. Paul was sitting in a jail cell going, “I would much rather die right now than endure any more of this.” He gets it in a different context than what we live in. Nobody ever said that when they were in a place in life where they were comfortable. Paul gets it, so he says, “To live is Christ, and to die is good. It’s gain. I can handle that, too.”

Verses 22-24,

“If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”

This is really cool. You see Paul’s pastor’s heart. This is the heart of a discipler and a disciple; a Christ-follower and a leader for the Gospel. It really seems like he’s wrestling back-and-forth out loud. “I want to go be with Jesus…I need to stay here…pray that I don’t get killed and that I’m able to stay and do ministry…but if I do die it’s going to be good.” He’s drawing us into this tension. Here it seems like he’s wrestling back-and-forth with his faith. If he stays on Earth, alive, he will have more opportunity for ministry. Oftentimes, when we endure some difficult situation, it’s true that we come away with a renewed awareness of urgency to share Christ and minister well to people who need Jesus. If you go through a difficult season of life or a hard situation and you come out of that with a cleaner, newer, fresher focus. You go through something hard and you say, “I don’t really care how much money I make, I just want people to know Jesus…I don’t really care if my kids go to x, y, or z university, I just want them to love Jesus.” Difficult things in your life put everything else into context. They change your values and what’s important to you. “I don’t care if my kid achieves this academic goal or that athletic goal—I want them to love Jesus. I don’t care if they are chubby doing it, or skinny doing it, or whatever.” The things that don’t matter once that child is ready to go into the world—do you know what I mean? Everything is contextualized in difficulty. So, I think Paul is in that kind of place right now. There is no question of Paul’s faithfulness to his call of the Gospel. It’s not like he’s copping out and saying, “I’m tapping out. Jesus, take me home. I’m done.” It’s not like that. We know the fruit that Paul loved to see produced. There are some things that we know Paul was passionate about—people getting saved, churches being planted, believers being built up and discipled, the Gospel defended in every arena. In the secular world, heretics and false teachers were called out and confronted and leaders were being effectively trained. These were the areas of Paul’s expertise, and passion, and calling. These were the areas where he was effective. He wasn’t looking for an easy out. The same desire that motivated him to finish these tasks motivated him to see Jesus. It’s not either-or.

Now listen—watch this—lean in hard because this is where it all clicks. The same thing that motivated Paul to long for Jesus, motivated him to want to stay here longer: to take that Christ and give Him to the world. So, now, the longing for Christ, for the minister of the Gospel, is a longing for Jesus through the ministry that’s in front of me. I want to work through this ministry. I want to work through the raising of my kids. I want to work through the advance of the Gospel. I want to work through the planting of churches. I want to work through buying our man on the ground in India a new truck. I want to work through getting the Berries back to Western Africa. I want to work through the conversion of the people in that country so that Baby Berry stands before the throne of Jesus, locking arms with those African people that her mama and daddy led to Jesus in the wake of her death. I want to work through and see the fruition of that on this side of glory so that I can blow through the doors on the other side gloriously shouting and screaming, having witnessed what I witnessed in this life. I want to go through it. It’s not an either-or. It was like a lightbulb exploded in my head in my study while I was looking at this. All the way through eighty percent of my study of this passage, I was thinking that Paul was in this, “Do I stay or do I go?” But it’s both! “As long as I can stay let me be faithful. Let me labor for the joy that’s set before me. I want to put my hand to the plow and not look back.” If Paul goes to be with the Lord all this ends for him—all the suffering, all the torture, all the hunger, and separation from other believers, struggle with sin and the flesh will all be over. It would be awesome and I think he really can’t imagine it, but as a pastor he longs to serve his congregation and achieve those goals that we just laid out. He wants to minister to others and see the Gospel spread. In that case, it’s better that he doesn’t die yet. His great love for his people and his God—this is a beautiful picture of both of these realities and of Paul’s own humanity.

In verses 25-26, he wants to equip the Church.

“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.”

He’s like, “You know what? Come to think of it, I don’t think I’m going anywhere, because there’s work to do.” I don’t know that he’s being like, “The Lord told me I’m going to keep on living.” I think it’s more like, “I don’t want to have the idea that there’s an end in sight. There’s work to do and I want to work until the end, regardless of when that comes. So, I’m convinced that I will remain with you.” Verse 26,

“So that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.”

There are some people God uses—listen—for some people, God uses decades of fruitful ministry to accomplish what He intends. For others, it may be only a few days or even a few hours. Ava lived five weeks and made a huge impact on this world. I had people come up to me at her funeral—Little and I were there and there were lots of people there. The Binghams are from a ranching community in West Texas and it was cowboy-land. It was awesome. This is what I want to be when I grow up. Cowboys were rolling up there in their big dualies. I guess they swapped their horses in for them. They were all driving big flatbed dualies and had cowboy boots and big buckles and hats. These big dudes were walking up and were talking to us about what an impact this little girl’s life had on them. But none of us ever saw her. The closest we got was a little white box and the granddaddy carried it out weeping over it. What an impact five weeks of that little girl’s life has made. There was one family member who came to faith in Jesus just by reading the blogs.

Then, there are pastors who have served faithfully proclaiming the Gospel and making disciples for many, many years. I think about Billy Graham who is now approaching a century, and even in his nineties, as recently as about two years ago, they were filming him speaking the Gospel. Tuck and I met a guy when we were on vacation last week who was ninety-six years old. He was wearing a WWII veteran’s hat and went up and talked to him. He served in the 251st Artillery Division in the South Pacific. I walked up and said, “How old are you?” and he said, “Ninety-six.” These guys were unloading a bass boat and he was going fishing at the lake. He went out and fished and this monsoon came. It rained and I thought, “I wonder where that old dude is? Maybe we should go look for him,” but here he came rolling back in three hours later and soaking wet. He’d been fishing. At ninety-six he was climbing in and out of the boat. I said, “Man, you are so impressive!” He said, “I’m shooting for one-fifteen.” He was so coherent. He said, “Whatever the Lord wants.” You know, God gives some people many, many, many years of ministry but some people just a brief time. The important thing is that on this side of your salvation you need to get to work. There is work to be done. To live is Christ.

We need to love our wives well, love our husbands well, love our kids well, love our community well, share the Gospel with your friends and neighbors, and do what you can to serve people. The important thing for all of us is to live our lives in light of the Gospel and our future departure from this world. Because we will one day be with Jesus as Paul now is, so until that day let’s work hard. Let’s work hard.

I’ll pray.

Lord, I pray that as we close our time together and sing a song or two in worship and reflection, that you would take the truth of your Word and settle it into our hearts and minds and help us to respond to your message tonight. Thank you for Paul’s heart, and his vision, and his passion, and his excitement, and his confidence in the Gospel. Help us to live like that. Help us to live like Jesus. In Jesus’ name.

(Rob Conti)

We are going to be singing that song one day while we are looking at Him. Man, it’s good. Oh, man. It’s awesome. We are all going to sing good, too. I don’t know if we get to pick who we sing like—like I want to worship the rest of eternity singing like Meatloaf or Josh Groban. It’s just going to be awesome, and it’s going to be good, and we are going to be together worshipping Jesus, and see Him. Man!

C.S. Lewis said this in his book, *The Weight of Glory*. He said that you’ve never interacted with a mere mortal. You’ve never talked to a mere mortal. You’ve never snubbed a mere mortal. Everybody you have ever talked to and everyone whose company you’ve enjoyed, and everyone whom you’ve ever talked about behind their back—they are immortal. They are going to live forever somewhere. He said, if we could see who they are going to be forever, like if we could see each other, as Christians, for who we will be in the presence of Jesus glorified, that it’s going to be so beautiful that if we saw each other like that now that we would be tempted to worship each other. But, if we could see with our physical eyes, people who will spend forever only suffering the wrath of God, that it would be so horrible that you would never sleep again. And we find ourselves in this moment of knowing Jesus and getting to worship Jesus, and we get to come together and listen to the words of Jesus, and sing to Him together, and then we get to—we get to—go advance the Gospel. Whatever avenue the Lord has specifically ordained for you—wherever you work and wherever you live—He has ordained it for you to go advance the Gospel. So, let’s do that this week. Let’s be faithful. Let’s celebrate the truth that we heard. Let’s be challenged by it and let’s go tell people about Jesus. Let’s go be faithful.

For some of you right now, you might think that the only people you are around all day are your kids. You are homeschooling or you are working and you won’t even leave the house tomorrow. Okay, then raise those kids in the fear and the admonition of the Lord and know that you are advancing the Gospel. It’s so good.

Please hang out after church. We would love to get to know you if you are visiting. Please plan ahead when you come to church. Tomorrow is a work day but you’re going to get to bed a little bit later because you’re going to hang out and fellowship with Christians. Please do that. Please hang out with us. A lot of us will stay so that we can get to know each other.

If you are not part of a small group or discipleship group, we have groups that meet in homes throughout the week. We don’t do a Sunday School and we don’t do a Sunday morning service but we do meetings in people’s homes and we talk about Jesus and we fellowship and we encourage one another. So, if you are not part of that you can email me at [rob@swoutfitters.com](mailto:rob@swoutfitters.com) and will get you into a small group.

Institute students, those of you who are working at Snowbird, we want to welcome you and also know that we will be getting you guys into small groups next week. Sound good?

I love you guys. Let me read this from Jude 24-25,

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

I love you, church.

August 28, 2016

Philippians 1:27-2:4

Brody Holloway

(Rob Conti)

We want to welcome you. As a church, we want to come together to exalt Christ through song and to see Him lifted high through His Word. So, at Red Oak, we primarily work through books of the Bible. Right now, we are finishing up chapter 1 of Philippians and we are probably going to go into chapter 2 a little bit. Maybe, we will see. We just work through the text to get the main meaning out of that passage and make that the main point of the sermon. Then, all of us need to take that away and meditate on it, and submit to it and apply it to our lives. So, when we meet together, that’s our goal. Then, from that, we want to have good fellowship with one another, encourage one another, and think about how we can stir one another up to love and good works, as the writer of Hebrews says we should do when we meet together. So, I hope, Red Oak members, that you came tonight with that mindset; that we don’t slide into the habit of coming to church at the last minute, run in, sit down, stand up, read, and listen, but that we come considering and planning how you are going to encourage somebody and how you are going to push somebody toward Jesus. I hope that you do that. And, I want to say to those who are visiting, that after the service is over we would love for you to hang out. As a church, we are really good at hanging out with each other—we truly are. So, people will hang out after the service for a solid hour, and I hope that you will hang out and give us the opportunity to get to know you better.

So, I have a couple of announcements. One is that there is a sign-up sheet in the back for the membership classes that we are going to be doing in October. So, if you would like to become a member, if you are interested in that, the way that we do our membership classes is that we don’t want to just quickly put a name on the roll, but we want to get to know you and we want to really get to go over the distinctives that we believe make up a biblical church. Because, within those distinctives there are responsibilities for pastors and there are responsibilities for members. We want everyone to be on the same page with what we believe, why we believe it, and what is going to be required of us to be a part of this fellowship. Those membership classes will be every Wednesday night through October. So, if you are interested in that please sign up in the back. Just put your name, number, and email on that and we will be contact with you.

Then, also, our small groups meet weekly in homes for discipleship groups. In the middle of the week we try to get together. We don’t have Sunday morning services and we don’t do Sunday School, so really the way that we connect and that we see, in the Body of Christ, the individual gifts that the Lord has empowered each one of us with, the way that we get to manifest that is in smaller groups of people getting together. So, we do that through small, discipleship groups. Right now, we have a wave of new people coming into those so we are kind of moving and shifting those groups around. So, this would be a great time if you are not in one to join one. So, if you are interested in that just contact me. My email is [rob@swoutfitters.com](mailto:rob@swoutfitters.com), and I’ll get you plugged into one of those. Also, if you haven’t grabbed one of the memorization cards they are in the back and you can grab one of those. Please do and be memorizing Scripture along with us.

So, let me do this. I’m going to read our passage for this evening and then we will pray and worship the Lord again through song. So, this is Philippians 1:27-2:4,

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. 29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Lord Jesus, God, I pray that your Spirit would meet with us now and that you would bring freedom to our minds and our hearts from any distractions and anything that would keep us from focusing on you. I pray that, whether it’s our sin that needs to be confessed, and forsaken, and brought before your throne to have your grace and mercy be poured out on it, I pray that we would, and that by your Spirit you would lead us to that. I pray that you would keep our minds from the distractions of daily tasks and things that we know we need to get done. I pray that we would be able to focus on you, Lord Jesus, our God, and our Savior, and our King, and our Redeemer. I pray that you would be glorified as we sing to you. In Christ’s name, Amen.

(Brody Holloway)

I’m going to read our text again. Philippians 1:27-2:4,

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. 29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

For those of you who are parents, if you’ve ever gone on a trip and you left your kids with somebody, one of the most dreadful things that can happen is to get the report that your kids are being little terrors. I always tell whoever the babysitter is, “Well, you know, they’re sinners. They need Jesus, so give them some grace.” But, it’s always really difficult if you get that kind of a report. One of the things that I’ve often done is tell the babysitter to put whatever kid it is on the phone. Then, I say, “Whether I’m there or whether I’m here, you know how you are supposed to behave. There is a behavior that should be exhibited in your life, whether I’m here or whether I’m there with you. It’s easy for you, now that I’m away, to behave that way and carry on like you are acting, but that’s not okay.”

So, Paul, having been a pastoral figure in the life of the Philippians; that’s what he’s saying to them. He’s saying, “I’m not there. I may come or I may not.” We looked last week at the fact that Paul wasn’t sure if he was going to die or if he was going to live, but if he lived he was going to go see them. So, now he’s saying in verse 28, “Regardless of what happens, whether I’m here and I’m absent from your presence, or whether I’m there with you, you guys know how you are supposed to act. Y’all know how you are supposed to behave. You know how you should carry on. But, let me reiterate and reinforce some things that will help you know how the church is supposed to act.”

Y’all, if there is anything we need to get right in our day and age, it’s the way the Church is supposed to act. I grew up in church, like a lot of you, and then I was driven away from the Church because of the way people acted. I don’t want to take away the fact that the hardness of my own heart was a source of bitterness. It’s no one else’s fault if I’m not following Jesus, is it? If somebody hurt you when you were small, or imposed a bunch of laws on you when you were a Christian kid growing up, your rebellion or your disobedience to the Lord is on you, not on them. But, a lot of us probably had that experience where Christians not acting like Christians oftentimes drives people away from the Church. Probably the area where it is most hurtful or painful is where Christians don’t treat each other the way they are supposed to treat each other. So, there should be a unity in the way that we act, and function, and love one another. So, one of the things that, as a parent, you want to see with your kids, is you want to see them love each other really well.

So, last week we looked at how Paul was saying, “I may die or I may live. I’m not sure, but either way God is going to be glorified, whether it’s in my life or whether it’s in my death. God is going to be glorified and I’m going to rejoice regardless of what happens.” Now, Paul is saying, “Now, that being said,”—he starts verse 27 with the word “only.” He says, “only.” Now, that word “only” is actually a really, really powerful word that is kind of like if I was going to make a point and I held my finger up and said, “Now, listen, this is really, really important that you get this. This is an important point. Don’t miss this. This is very important. This is what it all comes down to.” Okay? Only—this is what it all comes down to. This is what Paul is saying. So, when he says “only” we have to listen in, listen closely, lean hard into the text and see that there is a very important thing coming here. You will hear Paul say this often, “Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ….Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ.” Now, you will hear Paul say that often. In fact, at one point he says that it is his ambition, and he hopes that when his life comes to an end, that he would have faithfully lived in a manner worthy of the Gospel. I think that most of us could say that about our lives.

I think that there are a couple of things that motivate me in my life. I want to be able to say, when my days come to an end that I’ve been faithful to my wife and my family. That’s extremely motivating to me. I want to be able to, most importantly, stand before the Lord and know that I’ve finished the race, I’ve exhausted myself, I’ve worked and labored for the sake of and the advance of the Gospel, so that all people might hear the Gospel and know that I’ve given my life for the advance of the Gospel; the Gospel that I’ve contended for is the true Gospel and I have, indeed, contended for it. I’ve lived my life in obedience and faithfulness to the Gospel. Paul will often say that; he will say, “Live a manner of life worthy of the Gospel” or something like that.

Now, what’s important to understand in the context of Paul talking to the Philippians—those of you who were here in our introduction to Philippians you may remember how, in Acts, Paul talks about how Philippi was a city that he went to and how it was a Roman colony. Now, here’s what that means. A Roman colony or a Roman city would be kind of like a mini version of Rome. So, if you went to a Roman colony everything there would be Roman. If you ever traveled to New York City and you went to Chinatown or Little Italy, the city is sort of divided up into a Haitian area, a Mexican area, an Italian area, and a Chinese area, so if you go there, what it feels like when you go down one of those streets, if any of you have ever been there, is that you are in China, or wherever. In fact, in some of those places that you go they are actually speaking the native tongue of their homeland. So, here you are in America, in a major American city, but you are on this little side street in Chinatown, and you think, “I feel like I’m smack dab in the middle of a Jackie Chan movie.” You feel like you are there.

So, Roman colonies were like that. If you went into a Roman Colony it would feel very much like a miniaturized version of Rome—it would feel like Rome. Now, one of the things that we know to be true is that Paul was a Roman citizen. In fact, at one point in the story he was going to be beaten—remember this? In Acts, in the account of Paul’s ministry in Philippi, he is going to be beaten, thrown in jail, and worn out, but see, as a Roman citizen you had certain rights that others didn’t have. Like in our country here, anyone who goes to trial has the same rights. The Constitution covers anybody and everybody who goes to trial. But, in the Roman Empire, Roman citizens had certain rights that others did not have. So, when a Roman went to trial there were certain things that had to happen. There was a proper way to arrest a Roman and there was a proper way to charge them. So, Paul says, “Hey, you know, I’m a Roman citizen. Are you supposed to be beating me up like this without a trial?” And the guy was like, “Oh, my goodness.” Paul was born a Roman citizen and this man had paid for his citizenship. The most coveted thing you could have in the Roman Empire was Roman citizenship. And Philippi was a city full of Roman citizens but a lot of them had worked to earn that citizenship.

So, now, watch this contrast. So, living in Philippi, you have worked to earn the right to be Philippian or, more importantly, to be Roman. So, if you are a citizen of the Roman Empire in Philippi you have either worked to get that or you might possibly have been born into it. Most of them would have worked for it. Okay? So, now, a common thing for somebody to say would be that as a Roman citizen there would be certain behavioral characteristics that should be exhibited in your life. If you are a Roman citizen you are expected to act a certain way, to dress a certain way, to carry yourself a certain way, or to spend money on certain things.

We get some of this same kind of thing in our culture, particularly in certain parts of our culture. Little and I and the kids were driving through a suburb of a larger city in the United States recently. We drove down a street where the houses now have a trend in the suburbs, where they make the houses look a little bit different, each one of them, and that’s the uniqueness, but they are really all the same thing. Have you traveled through some of these areas? It’s like every little square patch of grass in front is groomed a certain way; every house has three bushes; every house has no cars exposed but they are all in the driveway; nobody has a woodshed; nobody has flags flying. It does not look anything like where I grew up or where I currently live. There are no chickens running around in anyone’s yard. Nobody is shooting guns out the back window. There is a certain manner of living expected of you in that neighborhood. Some of these communities are gated, where you have to go through a gate to get into it. When I was growing up I thought a gated community was where people rode Tennessee Walking Horses. Some of you will get that joke but most of you will not. It’s a true story. But, you go into one of these subdivisions and there is this thing called a Homeowners’ Association. Have you ever heard of one of these? Some of you are like, “No, I haven’t.” It’s okay. If you haven’t, that’s okay; you are not missing anything. I’ve never been part of one but I have heard horror stories.

When we went out to do little Ava Berry’s funeral recently, her grandparents, the Bingham’s, had moved onto this street full of houses, and I pulled into the driveway and just rolled on up into their yard, because there were a lot of cars there. So, I parked out in the middle of his yard and thought nothing of it. And he said, “I’ll probably hear from the president of the HOA,” which stands for Homeowners’ Association. That boggled my mind. I thought, “If I buy a house, and I pay taxes on the house, and I want to park in my grass, I’m going to park in my grass. In fact, if I don’t want any grass, I’ll make a mudhole like this cat at the end of Pisgah Road and we will build a dirt track in the front yard and we will have a big time. There ain’t nothing wrong with that. I’m cool with that. This is my yard. I’m a taxpayer.” But not when there’s a Homeowners’ Association. Are y’all with me?

So, Rome was a lot like that but it was amplified. It was very amplified. There were so many credentials, and behavior modifications, a way that you were supposed to act, and a way that you were supposed to spend money. It was very commonplace for people to say, “Man, you need to act like a Roman.” So, in verse 27, when Paul says, “Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel,” it’s an allusion to that idea, which he also addresses in Philippians 3:20. Look at 3:20,

“But our citizenship is in heaven,….”

Paul understands that we are citizens of an earthly kingdom for a while but of a heavenly kingdom eternally, and our citizenship in the heavenly kingdom is what defines us, not our citizenship in an earthly kingdom. Earthly kingdoms come and go and rise and fall. At this point, no one would have ever envisioned the Roman Empire ending. It seemed like the empire to end all empires but now it is no more. It’s no more. So, Paul understands that, much like a Roman would live a manner of life that is worthy of his Roman citizenship, Paul is saying that because you are a believer—live like it. Live like it.

And here is a very fine line. This is a very difficult dilemma for us as Christians. Many of us grew up in a religious setting where you were judged by the rules you were able to follow. That’s called legalism. Legalism, young people, is where you are told that if you behave this way—and maybe there might be a list of things you are supposed to do—then that means you can be a good Christian. What the Scripture says is that it is because of who you are in Christ, and the work of Christ in your life, that fruit is going to be exhibited and you are going to reflect Christ in the way you live your life. It is not that you earn God’s favor, or you earn the right to be a Christian, or you earn the right to stay Christian, it’s that Jesus saves us by His grace and because of that there is going to be fruit in your lives. Jesus says that people will know you by your fruit, and the main fruit will be that you obey. He says, “If you say that you are my disciple then you are going to follow me in obedience.”

So, for Romans, they had to live a certain way to maintain Roman citizenship. Paul says, “Live your life in a manner that is worthy of the Gospel” –the thing that saved you and gave you your heavenly citizenship. In light of that, I wanted to go through sort of the way that Paul tends to break down what the Gospel looks like. Paul says “gospel” two times in verse 27. He says, “Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel” and at the end he says, “Striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel.” William Hendricksen says this,

“To exercise their citizenship in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ means to conduct it in harmony with the responsibilities which that Gospel imposes and with the blessings which it brings.”

I’m going to read that again, because it’s important that we don’t fall into a lifestyle of following the rules just so we can feel Christian. Okay? How do we live a manner of life where we are working hard—Paul says, “Work out your salvation in fear and trembling.” So, exercise in obedience, follow the Lord, and be faithful to His Word. It’s not about whether you live up to some manmade potential or man-written laws; it’s do you live a life in obedience to the Lord because He saved you? The Gospel is what puts that in context. If we maintain a clear understanding of the Gospel, and we remind ourselves of the Gospel constantly, we will want to obey. I’m telling you, man, if I think about who I was before I met Jesus, and what I was before I met Jesus, and what Jesus has done to cleanse me from unrighteousness and to cover me in His blood, to save me from sin, to remove condemnation from my life, then I want to honor Him. I want to be obedient to Him. It’s a desire of the believer’s heart. One of the things you will find as a believer is that you desire things that you did not desire as an unbeliever. One of the marks of a believer—“I’m struggling with my salvation. I’m doubting. Am I saved or am I not? Am I really a Christian or am I not?”—do you desire to honor the Lord? Do you desire to obey Jesus? Do you want to be like Jesus? Do you want other people to know Jesus? Those are evidences of a believer’s faith.

Let me read that again from William Hendricksen,

“To exercise their citizenship in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ means to conduct it in harmony with the responsibilities which that Gospel imposes….”

See, when God saves us it’s free but He imposes responsibilities on us. We are called to obedience.

“…and with the blessings which it brings.”

For those of us in Christ there are blessings that can never be taken away from us. So, how do we do this? Breaking it down the way that Paul breaks it down when he uses the word “Gospel”, I’m going to give you seven things that he means. These are seven aspects of the Gospel or seven cues we see, so when Paul says “the Gospel” here is what he means. These are seven aspects of the Gospel or seven things that Paul means when he talks about the Gospel.

When Paul is talking about the Gospel, he’s talking about the power of the Gospel, first. In Romans 1:!6, he says,

“I’m not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; it’s the power of God to everybody who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

The Gospel is the power of God. The power of God on fullest display is the Gospel.

It seems like we’ve had a lot of dry lightning lately and I love to watch the sky, especially when it’s right at dusk and the sky is like a laser show. Y’all know what I’m talking about? It’s incredible to watch, and if you watch the power of lightning, or the power of an earthquake, or the power of a tornado, what nature is capable of accomplishing is crazy to me. When the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in World War II, people were blown away that man could fabricate something that powerful, and yet a single earthquake prior to that had wiped out just as many people on that continent. Because nature is so powerful and it is oftentimes destructive in that power, but when Paul describes the power of God he doesn’t say, “Behold the tornado, it’s the power of God on display.” He doesn’t say, “Behold a massive earthquake, it is the power of God on display.” He says, “I’m not ashamed of the Gospel because it’s the power of God.”

The greatest act of God’s power is His ability to take a lost person in their obstinance, in their rebellion, and in their hardness of heart – Maybe that person came from a background where they had no concept of the Gospel. Maybe they came from a remote tribe somewhere that had never heard about Jesus. – But God engages them with the Gospel and they come to faith in Jesus. Think of men like those brothers we are partnered with in that fellowship in India who have come to faith in Jesus out of darkness. But for many of us, the Gospel penetrated a world of religion. We grew up going to church; we grew up saying the right things; we grew up saying the sinner’s prayer every time we went to camp or a retreat because we wanted to ‘nail it down’. We grew up in that world of religion and activity. It’s pretty fascinating when Jesus saves someone who grew up in the church but they got to adulthood and realized they were never a Christian at all. The power of the Gospel saves people. So, when Paul talks about Gospel, he’s talking about the power itself of the Gospel. The word ‘power’, by the way, in Romans 1:16, is the word ‘*dunamis*’ and is the word we get ‘dynamite’ from.

This is a really cool thought here. We talk a lot about how when Jesus saves somebody that He puts to death the old person and there is a resurrection that occurs. So, in salvation, the old is gone, the new is come, we are buried with Christ in the likeness of His death, and we are raised with Christ in the likeness of His resurrection, as it says in Romans 6. In Galatians 2:20, the Bible says that we are crucified with Christ, so it is no longer me living but Christ living in me, and the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. So, I’m crucified with Christ, nailed to the cross with Him, put in the ground with Him, and raised to walk with Him. The picture of salvation is, in one sense, a picture of destruction, because something is put to death when the Gospel is unleashed on somebody’s life. Something is put to death. All of your own desires, all of your own demands, all of your obstinance and hardness of heart are put to death. The old man dies and the new man is raised to walk. And dynamite is like this.

We have an opportunity to do this a lot in this part of the country. When you are driving on an interstate, does it blow your mind when you go through a gorge where there is sheer rock on either side? You think, “It seems like it would have been easier to build this road around this mountain, but no, they just blasted a hole right through the middle of it.” Have you ever seen that? Pay attention to this; I think you can see this over in Sam’s Gap, if you’ve ever crossed Highway 26 into Johnson City, north of Asheville. You’ll see long, cylindrical tubes cut out of the rock where they drilled holes, and guess what they dropped into those holes? Dynamite. They drop dynamite into those holes and they blow out huge chunks of rock. I can only imagine how destructive that must look. Can you imagine? That would be awesome to see. I’ve shot Tannerite[[52]](#footnote-52) before. If you know what Tannerite is, we shot a five pound can of that one time. You talk about a hillbilly; we put a five pound can of Tannerite under an old lawnmower, and I’m not lying, half of that lawnmower went two hundred feet straight up into the air. That is hillbilly fun, right there. We were at a men’s retreat and we let this sixteen year old kid shoot it. That kid had never shot a gun and he was still grinning the next day when I left from that retreat, he was so excited. The explosion that dynamite would cause in blasting a hole through a rock is very destructive, but what is there now is an engineering marvel. I don’t know how to build an interstate; I wouldn’t know where to start. Driving through Sam’s Gap, I’m looking around and going, “They built an interstate here. Not a road, but a four-lane highway, and semis go through there.” It’s incredible. The destruction of what was there made way for the miraculous engineering and construction of what would come. The Gospel is like that, specifically, the power of the Gospel is like that. Make sense? Yeah. It destroys what needs to be destroyed and what is then put there in the place of that is an absolute marvel. So, first, Paul is talking about the power of the Gospel.

Number two. When Paul is talking about the Gospel, he is talking about its Author. He recognizes over and over that the Gospel is not manmade. In fact, in 1 Thessalonians 2:9, Paul calls it the Gospel of God. In 1 Thessalonians 3:2, he calls it the Gospel of Christ. And listen to what he says in Galatians 1:11. He says this,

“For I would have you know, brothers, that the Gospel that was preached by me is not man’s Gospel.”

So, when he’s talking about the Gospel, he’s recognizing the Author of the Gospel. It comes from God. It comes from Christ. It is by God, in Christ fulfilled at the cross, and at the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in the ascension and exaltation of Christ the Gospel is complete. God is the Author of the Gospel.

Number three. Paul is talking about its emphasis. What does the Gospel emphasize? It’s important that we get this list right, I think, because we often say around here, “Preach the Gospel to yourself every day.” What do we mean by that? This is a great exercise as a church and as individuals. Let’s go through this. The power of the Gospel—what is that? It saves sinners. The Author of the Gospel—who is it by and from? The Lord Jesus. What is the emphasis of the Gospel? In Acts 20:24, Paul is talking in that text and he says, “It is the Gospel of the grace of God.” If you want to describe the Gospel, you use the grace of God to describe it. So the emphasis of the Gospel is God’s sovereign, unmerited grace, which means that if you are in Christ, you are there in Christ because He got you and put you there, not because you earned it. That’s beautiful. That’s beautiful.

Maybe you find yourself in conversation sometimes, not debate, because as Christians nobody comes to faith in Jesus because we debate them and beat them. But, have you ever talked to someone and they say, “I just can’t believe it. I can’t grab hold of it”? Listen, the one thing in my life that I cannot deny is the greatest reality that has ever been made known to me—There is a God and He is unreachable, and His salvation is unattainable, and He came to me, and He saved me. There’s no denying that. My salvation rests in the sovereign unmerited work and favor of God, and I’m really thankful for that.

Number four. When Paul talks about the Gospel he is talking about its message. One of my favorite texts in explaining this is in 1 Corinthians 15, which is a very familiar text for some of us. It says this,

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

So, the message of the Gospel is that message laid out in 1 Corinthians 15. The story of who Christ is, and what He did, and the virgin birth, and the sinless life, and the prophecies fulfilled, and the ministry of Jesus, and the victory of the cross, and the empty grave. That’s the message of the Gospel, which is also laid out in Galatians 2:20, where we are crucified with Christ and that’s why we live, because we’ve been raised with Christ.

Number five. The fifth thing that Paul would emphasize would be the implication of the Gospel. What does the Gospel imply? We say that Red Oak is a Gospel-centered church. We are not bound by denomination. I’ve had people from denominations tell me that my salvation needed to be questioned because I didn’t come to faith in their denomination, or I wasn’t baptized into their denomination, or I hadn’t taken communion in their denomination. I’ve had people tell me that there should be an extra baptism of the Holy Spirit, whereby you receive certain gifts. Let me tell you something, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the implication of the Gospel is that if I accept it I am saved. If I reject it I am condemned. That’s as simple as it gets. The implications of the Gospel—listen to me here tonight, if you are here and you are not a believer—the implication of the Gospel is this; that Jesus didn’t come into the world to condemn the world because the world was condemned already. We live in a broken, fallen world that is locked up under condemnation, and to reject the Gospel, the implication of that rejection is to seal myself into eternal condemnation. But the implication of accepting that Gospel is salvation in Christ, by Christ, for His glory, and for my good. So, when Paul talks about the Gospel, he talks about the implication. You see this often, where he has an urgency about himself, and he’s urging people. We will get to that in a minute.

Number six. When he is talking about the Gospel, he is talking about the ambassadors of the Gospel. In Romans 1:1, Paul identifies himself as being set apart for the Gospel. In 1 Corinthians 9:16—I love this—he says, “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.” He recognizes himself as an ambassador of the Gospel and he would often challenge us that if we are a Christian we are, too, an ambassador of the Gospel. One of the things that should be evident in our lives is that we should proclaim Christ in our workplace and proclaim Christ in our social circles. We should not just rub shoulders with believers. We should mix it up with unbelievers, and God-haters, and whoremongers, and pillheads, and people who are in jail, or in prison serving time for ugly crimes. We should live our lives engaging people who live in alternate lifestyles. We should care about people enough to tell them the Gospel, because we are ambassadors. Paul also says it this way to the Corinthians, “We are ministers of reconciliation.” We have the message of hope that reconciles man to God, so we are ambassadors.

Number seven. The last thing that Paul is talking about when he’s talking about the Gospel is its appeal. He is talking about the appeal of the Gospel. Listen to this verse in 2 Corinthians 5:20,

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

This is moving from an implication to an urging. As ambassadors, we recognize the implication of people rejecting the Gospel, therefore we urge them, we implore them, and if necessary we beg them to receive Christ, because we know the implications. So, as ambassadors, understanding the implications, we will then bring an appeal. A person who’s been saved by the Gospel, and who understands its implications, and recognizes his ambassadorship for the Gospel, will then urge those he comes into contact with on a daily basis, or on a weekly basis, to receive Christ. We contend for the faith.

So, that’s what Paul means when he’s talking about the Gospel. These are elements of the Gospel that we often see in Paul. So, now, to go back, he says we are to live a manner of life worthy of all of that. Recognizing your salvation, understanding what’s at stake, laboring for the advancement of the Gospel, reaching the nations with the Gospel, understanding what Jesus has saved us from—all of that should matter and we should live a manner of life that reflects it because our citizenship is in Heaven.

Then he says this in verse 27,

“…whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”

He says “standing” and “striving.” The idea of standing firm is a really strong word. “Standing” is a really strong word. It’s a military term that has the idea of holding a critical military position. If you can, imagine a fort that is being encroached by the enemy and if this fort falls a whole nation of people are going to cave in. Maybe this fort is on a border, or a river, or a bay, and if we can just hold this fort and keep the enemy at bay—that’s what that means, you know—the idea of keeping something at bay. The navy has launched their attack and there is a fortified position and that fort has got to stand, because if it doesn’t stand the enemy is going to come onto the banks and penetrate that society, or that civilization, or that shore, and conquer that people.

The idea of us, as Christians, standing firm—Paul says this all the time. In 1 Corinthians 15:58, Romans 14:4, 1 Corinthians 16:13—you will see Paul call us to stand firm. Stand firm, be immovable, be steadfast; Paul will say things like this. We have to stand firm and contend for the faith. Paul is saying that there is much to lose if we don’t do our job, and the job he is calling us to is that of Christian warriors or soldiers. It’s military terminology and we know that the Christian life is often spoken of in these terms in the Bible. You will remember that Jesus even said that the gates of Hell will not prevail against the advance of the Church. So, this picture is that the Church is taking ground from the Enemy and that ultimately the Church will be victorious. He is going to balance that in a minute by taking the word “suffering” and helping us to understand it in context, because a lot of Christians think that the idea of standing firm means that we should beat everybody up with our beliefs. We should shove it down their throat, hit them in the head, battle them politically, be loud and obnoxious, and be unloving. That’s not what it means; it’s not. It’s a militant idea in the sense that we engage people and in the sense that we recognize that there is a real demonic power that wants to stop the advance of the Gospel. Church, do you believe that? There is a real demonic force that says, “We want to draw lines in the sand. We don’t want the Gospel to advance. We want to disrupt what God is doing. We want to lie. We want to create disunity in the Church,” and we have to go to war against that enemy, not against lost people. Lost people are not the enemy. Unregenerate people are not the enemy. We want to reach people as we are ambassadors of the Gospel and we want to advance and hold our position.

So, then, Paul switches position, when he says “standing firm” and “striving.” The idea of striving has a little bit more of an athletic flair to it. It’s an idea of teamwork and working together. At some point in this school year, you’re going to go watch this, particularly in goal-scoring sports, particularly in basketball. Basketball would probably be the best example. You are going to go watch a basketball game and you’re going to see a team that has that one kid who shoots the ball every time he comes down the court. What do we call that? A ball hog. We call that kid a ball hog. That’s no fun. He might be really good but don’t you appreciate a team that plays really good together, and everybody is selfless, and they are working together to beat the opponent in the contest that they’re in, whether it’s basketball, or baseball, or volleyball, or soccer? You are wanting to see a team work together to beat their opponent. The idea is that if we are going to advance the Gospel then, as a Church, we have to be unified, as a team, as a body, as a family, working together, and loving each other well. And Paul is going to explain how we do that in just a second, in a little more detail. But, we are striving together, holding this position, and advancing the Gospel.

So, what does this mean for us, practically? What does God expect from us? As a church, what did he expect from the Philippians? How did he want them to do this together? How does he want us to be unified and do this together? Here are three things, real quickly.

Number one. The Gospel attitude of this church, as with the Philippians, toward God, needs to be tenacious. In other words, we need to recognize the authority that God has over the mission that we are on. Let me say that again. We need to recognize the authority that God has over the mission that we are on. So, when you’re sharing the Gospel with your friends, and family, and neighbors, and you are trying to love people really well and you are trying to minister to people really well, you are doing that with the confidence that God is sovereign, and all-powerful, and in control, and He has called us to do this. He raised Jesus from the dead, and He raises the dead to life, and He changes sinners. Be tenacious in that belief. Be dogged in that belief.

There are things that we do not need to be dogmatic about. We do not need to be dogmatic about certain things that people in the Church disagree on. There are certain disagreements that people have and there are certain denominational divides. Some people baptize their babies and some people don’t baptize their babies. Some people are cessationists, which means that they don’t think that people speak in tongues anymore, and some people think they do. Some people do it all the time and they go way overboard. People disagree on things and we need to be careful what we do with dogma. Young people, dogma means believing something and refusing to compromise, or bend, or give any. But, when it comes to the tenacity of which we view God, and His authority over the Gospel, and the saving of sinners, and the holding of Heaven, and the guarding of Hell, we need to be tenacious in that belief. As a Church, this is where there has to be doctrinal integrity. This is where there will be times where it will not be popular to say that homosexuality, as an advanced, progressive, political ideology in our nation, goes against what God intended for man and woman, in marriage, to reflect the Gospel. We will boldly say that but we need to not make it a political thing. It’s a Gospel thing. We want to do things in obedience to God’s command. So, we believe with tenacity the authority of God over all things. So, we stand firm and we strive with tenacity in terms of how we view God. Our faith, God’s authority, God’s Word—those are the things that will give us this tenacity. Our faith, God’s authority in our lives, and God’s Word, will build confidence in our lives of who God is.

Number two. The second thing that this idea of standing and striving means for us is that the attitude that we have toward one another needs to be one of harmony and unity. That’s why he says “in one spirit” and striving “side by side.” We should be unified. When you are at odds with another believer doesn’t it make you lose sleep, and disrupt your life, and make you unhappy, and maybe even take joy away from some of the areas of your life that you would typically enjoy? It’s because that brokenness of fellowship is there. The attitude towards one another must be to strive toward harmony and unity.

Number three. Our attitude toward the enemy must be one of courage, boldness, and fearlessness. For us, we go, “Okay, who is the enemy?” We are thinking in more of a spiritual realm. Think about the church in Philippi, where in just a minute Paul is going to recognize who their enemies are. He’s going to say that they are going to suffer. For us, we aren’t really going to suffer. We may have a little bit of cultural discomfort when your political candidate doesn’t win, or you have Supreme Court justices that get appointed who don’t stand on the authority of God’s Word. Yeah, we might have some discomfort or maybe have a lack of confidence in our leaders, but for these guys the stakes were very high. Paul says in verse 29 that it’s been granted to them that they should suffer for Christ’s sake. It’s been granted to them that they should suffer. So, there is a need for fearlessness in the church in Philippi because, remember, Paul’s initiation into the city of Philippi was that he was beaten, and beaten, and beaten, and thrown into prison, and he says, “You’re going to suffer, too.” Then, not just at the hands of those leaders, but listen to what he says in Philippians 3:2, in terms of those people in the Church,

“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh,”

and then in 3:18-19, he says,

“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”

So, he identifies the enemy in their context, which would be those who come against the advance of the Gospel. So, recognize the enemy and be intrepid in your attitude toward the enemy. For us, it’s toward the demonic or satanic force at work through cultural influences that come and push back against the advance of the Gospel. The failure of the enemies to intimidate Paul or the Philippian church and the fearlessness of believers in their undaunting courage and refusal to shrink back, these are proof that God is at work.

Look what he says in verse 28,

“…not frightened in anything by your opponents.”

So, these Christians who were being persecuted were not frightened by their opponents. This is something that we know to be true from the testimonies that come out of places where Christians are persecuted. There is a fearlessness and a boldness that God gives those people in their time and moment of persecution. We know this to be true. So, he says of the fact that they are not frightened in anything by their opponents,

“…This is a clear sign to them of their destruction.”

So, the fearlessness of persecuted believers is a clear sign to those who are doing the persecuting. Watch this—it’s a clear sign to them that the Gospel is legitimate. Why? Because the thing that is upholding the faith and the strength of the persecuted believer is stronger than the greatest efforts of man or Satan to bring persecution, and pain, and suffering, and particularly, in that pain and suffering to make someone’s faith break. You cannot take something that is immovable, unbreakable, and that cannot be defended by man because it is defended by God, imperishable, untarnished, that will be kept in Heaven for us—you cannot take something that’s satanic, or demonic, or earthly and break that greater thing with it. So, Paul says that when you are persecuted, and you don’t bend, and you stay strong, and you remain steadfast, and you don’t shrink back, that is evidence that they are wrong and that God is standing firm in and through your life. It becomes a sign that is clear to them of their destruction.

In verse 29, he says that two things have been granted to the believer. Number one, our faith. He says,

“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him…”

So, it’s been granted to us that we believe. Listen, y’all—your faith in Christ is a gift of God, not of works. You didn’t conjure up enough belief to grab a hold of Jesus. He took hold of you. If you’re a Christian, He washed you, He cleansed you, He gave you a new mind, and He gave you a new heart. Think back, those of you who are older, from your teenage years on, especially—think back if you are an adult—can you remember how hard-hearted you were to the Gospel? Why is that? Just think about this for your unbelieving friends. I don’t believe in the Easter Bunny. I don’t believe in the Tooth Fairy (I’m sorry if your kids are here and they’re hearing this—welcome to church). I don’t believe in Santa Claus. And you know what—I’m not mad at any of those three non-existing people. Is it not interesting that those who reject belief in the God of the Bible, hate the very God that they reject. The two premises of modern atheism, according to Douglas Wilson, are this: 1) There is no God, and 2) I hate Him. There is no God and I hate Him. It’s venomous when people talk to you about your faith. In the same breath they reject the existence and authority of God. Isn’t it interesting? And some of you were like that. That’s how you were. That faith was granted to you, which overcame that type of doubt, and obstinance, and rebellion, and hard-heartedness.

Then, Paul says the second thing is this,

“…but also suffer for his sake…”

It was granted to them to suffer. So, for the Philippians, it was granted to them that they would suffer for His sake. This is difficult for us to wrap our brains around, but it was a privilege. How is suffering a privilege?

Number one. Because it brings me nearer to Christ and His experience. When you suffer it brings you closer to the experience of Christ. Philippians 3:10 is very familiar and one of our favorite verses in the whole book.

“That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”

Suffering brings us closer to Christ. Number two. Suffering provides assurance of salvation. Listen to what Peter says in 1 Peter 4:4,

“With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.”

How is it that you cannot join them? It shocks people. It’s like, “Why are you not carried away by this cultural draw or tide?” It’s because you have assurance of your salvation that even in suffering God is using that suffering for His good.

Number three. Suffering will be rewarded hereafter. Romans 8:18 says,

“I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed.”

There is a glory to be revealed that will pale the suffering of this present age. Financial woes, medical woes, family dysfunction, and whatever—it will end and be no more. Suffering reminds us of that.

Number four. Suffering is a privilege and an honor granted to us because it gives us an opportunity to win unbelievers to Christ. Remember what he said in Philippians 1:12,

“I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

So, oftentimes, our suffering is an opportunity to win unbelievers to Christ.

Lastly, suffering leads to Satan’s frustration and God’s glory. God told Paul—go read it in Acts 9:16; at Saul’s conversion God says, “I’m going to make him suffer a lot.” And that suffering is going to open doors for the Gospel and people are going to come to faith in Jesus as a result of that suffering.

You can read stories about the martyrs of the faith throughout time. Oftentimes, the blood of martyrs legitimately paves the way for the Gospel into a culture or a people. Paul was like that. It thwarts Satan’s plans. Remember how frustrated Satan was over Job’s refusal to back down from his faith in God. So suffering gives us that opportunity.

Chapter 2 is really a beautiful passage of Scripture. We are going to wrap it up and land the plane. So, how do we, on mission, facing an opposing power as we advance the Gospel as a church, do this well? Paul says a couple of things.

Number one. Philippians 2:1,

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind.”

There’s a need for us to strive toward likemindness. This is not like a cult where people are told to believe what they believe. This is, as we each pursue Christ and strive for the Lord, and a deeper knowledge of God, and be conformed to the image of Christ, we become more and more likeminded. As a relationship matures you are able to get along better. Well, as we mature in our individual relationships with the Lord, and we think on all of these things, “if there is any encouragement in Christ, and comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, be of the same mind, have the same love,” we see that we are to be of the same mind and we are to have the same love towards one another. We should love each other. This is really simple. We should love each other.

“Being in full accord and of one mind.”

There should be unity in the way that we advance the work of the Church and advance the work of the Gospel. We should be unified on mission. That’s why it’s so important that you are a member or a part of a church that you are likeminded with the way that church is going. So you can get on mission and move forward.

Summing it up he says this, “Serve one another, love one another, do nothing from rivalry, and do nothing from conceit.” In other words, care more about one another than you care about yourself. If we are a church that’s going to advance the cause of the Gospel, and see lives changed, and reach people to the ends of the Earth; if we are a church that’s going to engage these three or four towns, cities, counties, and communities around us, from Clay County, to the other end of Cherokee County, and to Graham County, and all the way over into Bryson City—if we are going to engage these cultures, these towns, and these communities, we need to love each other well and we need to not be conceited in our actions. There should be a removal of rivalry within the Church. We should care most importantly about the advance of the Gospel. We should love one another really well. We should do nothing from rivalry and nothing from conceit. We should care more about others than we care about ourselves. In a word that most men are uncomfortable with, we should be sensitive to the needs of others. We should be sensitive to and aware of the needs of others and in tune to the needs of others; not just aware of them but in recognizing them having a desire to meet those needs in whatever way I can.

In doing that, here’s what we have—a really good way to live our lives.

“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Would that be a good way for us to live our lives? Yeah. If we are a church that says, “I’m concerned about others. I love others. I want to help others. I want to help my neighbors and my unbelieving neighbors.” The Scripture says that, as a Christian, we will be known by how we love unbelievers. We will be known by how we love each other. We will be known by how we love the Lord. Our love, our charity, our grace toward one another, how quickly we give someone the benefit of the doubt, how quickly we extend forgiveness and grace, how quickly we give someone credibility even though they haven’t earned it—but, most often, it’s the other side. We give someone respect when they earn it, but the Gospel says no, no, no – give them respect, give them charity, give them love, give them grace, and you will find that, as Christians, there will be a desire in them to earn it. This doesn’t mean that we empower laziness or facilitate people not doing what is right, but it means that we love each other well and prefer each other well, and serve each other well, and build unity through community, and service, and love, and respect. We engage each other day to day in life.

If you are here tonight and you don’t know Jesus and the Gospel that Paul laid out for us in those seven or eight things we looked at earlier, tonight I invite you to follow Jesus. Call on the name of the Lord and be saved. The Bible says, very simply, that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. At Red Oak we don’t typically do an invitation like you may have traditionally seen, but I’ll tell you this, the invitation to each one of us tonight is, “How do you respond to Jesus?” Both as believers and unbelievers, what do you do with the Gospel? Where is your citizenship? What matters most to you? How do you view suffering? What are you standing firm for? What do you think about people and what are you doing about it? If you don’t have a relationship with Him tonight, respond to the Lord. Come to Christ. Follow the Lord. Receive what He has for you, which is salvation. Remember the implications and receive Christ and receive the gift of eternal life.

I’ll pray.

Our heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for your Word that was given to men by your Spirit, and who were literally carried by your Spirit, and who literally, under the power and control of your Spirit, wrote words that were authoritatively inspired by you, and that were put on paper by you. God, we believe that about your Word. We do not compromise our belief in your Word and with tenacity we hold fast to it. We hold fast to our faith, we hold fast to your Word, and we hold fast to your authority. God, tonight, I pray for people who don’t have a relationship with you and who don’t know you. I pray that you would save them and I pray that this church would be a light in this community and that Western North Carolina would be impacted, that the United States of America would be impacted, and that the nations and the ends of the Earth would be impacted. I pray that our unity and fellowship would be reflected in the way that we love each other well and the way that we negotiate and navigate problems. We know that later in this book that Paul has to address two people who were not getting along. There is a right way to handle conflict and we ask that you help us to do that by giving one another the benefit of the doubt and sharing in each other’s suffering and pain. God, I pray that we would be able to receive, as the Philippians did, Paul’s words, so that if nothing else our lives would be lived in unity for the Gospel, whether I’m there or not. Lord, we know that there will be a day when you do return and when we do see you, and we worship you as you are. Help us to be faithful until that day. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

(Shawn Clark)

I love y’all, church. I love the Word of God and I love the way that, when I hear it and when I read it, I love the way that it exposes things in my life. And I’m praying for us as we walk through this book together that it would continue to expose areas where we need to grow, where we need to be challenged, and where we need to be encouraged. I know it’s doing it to me, personally, and I’m praying that corporately that it is doing the same thing. I’m praying that as we hear—and hopefully tonight you took good notes, or you are already planning on going back through the podcast, or you are planning on being prepared for small group discussion, because this is good stuff, y’all. This is stuff where, when I’m hearing things like Brody was saying about being likeminded in the pursuit of the Gospel, I can think about relationships, personally, in this church, where that idea of likeminded is, I’m like, “Yes. Yes.” In the way we pursue each other and in the way we treat each other, I’m like, “Yes.” I want to be ever mindful of how I’m treating you all, how I’m praying for you all, how I’m speaking truth to you all, and how you are speaking truth to me. Let us have that mindset in how we love each other, how we are loving this community, and all the things that Brody talked about tonight, and all the things that Paul is pointing out to us. Let us be ever mindful of that.

For those of you who don’t know Christ, as Brody said, find someone to walk through the Gospel with you. And if tonight was the night that you know the Lord is calling you, and He is talking to you, please tell one of us. Let us pursue each other and let’s continue to pursue the Gospel and proclaim the Gospel.

I want to leave us with some more words from Paul out of Romans 8:38,

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

I love y’all, church. Goodnight.

September 4, 2016

Philippians 2:5-9

Rob Conti

Hello, everyone. I’m excited about tonight. I don’t know how many of you have read ahead but this is one of the best passages in the Bible. The Bible is God’s Word and all of it has been breathed out by God, and all of it is profitable for correction, and rebuke, and instruction in righteousness. All of it is good and all of it is the Word of God but this passage of Scripture is amazing. This passage of Scripture clearly exalts the person of Jesus Christ, who He is, what He’s done, why He did it, and what it means for us. It’s beautiful.

So, if you are not already there, go ahead and open your Bibles to Philippians 2. We will keep building on the study through this book that has already been so rich and so good. Real quick, I’m going to read this passage again, starting in Philippians 2:1. Paul says this,

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

He starts with “so” or “therefore.” He is referring back to this conversation that we started in last week’s sermon, where Paul says we need to walk worthy. In verse 1:27, he says,

“Only let your manner of life…”

Let the way that you walk, the way that you live this life…

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ…”

Then, he begins to lay out what that looks like. He begins to lay out what walking worthy means—because he’s not just talking to one individual, he is talking to the Church. Immediately he is talking to the Church at Philippi, but by extension he is talking to the Church universal, and today to Red Oak Church. He is saying that for you to walk worthy, for you to live your life as a Church worthy of the Gospel, you’ve got to be likeminded, you’ve got to be one, you’ve got to be united. If we are going to advance the Gospel and personally advance in the Gospel, and then as a Church if we are going to advance the Gospel into our community, in our town, into this world, and into the dark corners of this Earth; if we are going to do that we have to be unified. We have to be of one mind, so he says we have to strive side-by-side. That’s what you are going to have to do. So, he is referring back to that, because at the end of chapter 1, he says, “It has been granted to you.” The word is like it has been graced to us—not only to believe in Jesus—that’s grace, right? If you believe in Jesus, that’s grace. You didn’t come up with that idea on your own. You didn’t wake up one day and think, “I’d like to be rescued from Hell, so I’ll think of this story. What shall I call it? It will be good news, so I’ll call it the Gospel.” You didn’t come up with it. It’s not your idea. It is the grace of God that you have been granted faith. Then, Paul says, likewise, you have been granted—graced—that you would suffer with Jesus. Immediately, for the Philippians that was already happening. They were experiencing persecution. He says that they are experiencing the same thing that he’s experiencing. Then he says, because of that, because of the suffering that’s coming for the Gospel, be united, be of one mind.

Then, he says “Therefore, if….” and then he begins all of these “if” statements. In the original language, the “if” would carry through and it would literally read more like this, “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort from love, if any participation in the Spirit, if any affection in sympathy,….” But, he’s using the “if” to get our attention. It’s like saying, “If the Pope is Catholic.” What do I mean? The Pope is Catholic. I mean “obviously.” That’s what Paul’s saying, “This is obvious.” Right? It should be clear and well-known. The weight of what he’s about to say—to be likeminded, to be unified, to be one—we should be that as the Church. We should be that because, obviously, we have encouragement in Christ. We have it. With the weight of what he means behind what he says, it would read more like this, “Since there is encouragement in Christ, since there is comfort from love, since there is participation in the Spirit, since there is affection in sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord, and of one mind.”

Since we have this in Christ—we have encouragement. Here the word “encouragement” is like having comfort in the face of trial, of suffering, and of pain. This is where he just left us in chapter 1, right? Persecution is coming. Suffering is coming. But since there is encouragement in Christ…of course there is encouragement in Christ. Why? Jesus said—listen—“If you follow me, if they hated me they will hate you.” If you desire to live a holy life you will suffer. But, what else did he say. “Don’t be worried. Don’t fear this world.” Why? Jesus said, “I’ve overcome the world.” What’s the worst that they can do to us? What’s the worst trial and suffering that we can go through? Jesus has overcome it. For us, what would be the greatest fear of all mankind in the history of the world? The fear of death. Is there any encouragement in Christ in the face of suffering and in the face of trials? Yeah. Why? Jesus overcame, and destroyed, and killed death, so that for the believer we cannot die. Because Jesus rose from the grave you and I can’t die, because we are in Jesus, and death couldn’t hold Him, it can’t touch us. Because I’m in Him. I’m with Jesus. So, of course there’s encouragement in Christ.

Of course there’s comfort from love. Should there be comfort in the midst of the worst suffering? Yeah. Why? Because we have the love of God. What kind of love is this? What kind of love is it that while we were yet sinners God demonstrated His love for us? That’s when He showed us His love. That’s when He made known His love—while we were sinners, while we were enemies. That’s when He came to die for us. That’s when He came to lay down His life. Of course there’s comfort from love. God the Father loves you in Jesus.

So, we do this thing where we get together every week and talk about the Bible, right? Are y’all with me? Do y’all hear me? So, we do this thing where we get together and we talk about the Bible. We talk about Jesus. We should. We are Christians. We are followers of Jesus. Don’t let this get old to you right now. Don’t be numb to this. Spencer prayed when he opened up in song to worship Jesus, because He’s worthy of it, but he said, “God, please let us focus our hearts and our minds. Let this prep us for what we are about to hear.” Don’t grow numb to this. If you are eight years old and you’re a new Christian, or if you’re older and have been a Christian for a long time, don’t get numb to this. Listen to me—God—if you are a Christian, if you are in Christ—the Father loves you with the exact same love that He loves Jesus with. It’s eternal, it’s selfless, it doesn’t end, and it’s perfect. The Father, and Son, and the Spirit, existing in perfect peace, and fellowship, and harmony, and love, for all of eternity, and Jesus, God, and the Spirit love you with that exact, same kind of love. It’s the same love. So, is there comfort from love? Absolutely.

Is there participation in the Spirit? Yes, obviously. We’ve been sealed. You’ve been made alive. If you’ve repented and you believed, it is because you were quickened. You were made alive by the Spirit of God and then the Spirit of God sealed you. He put the mark of God on you that says that no one else can touch you. You belong to the King, the One True King, and no one can take you from that. No one can break that seal. You belong to God. You are His property and the Spirit has been given as the guarantee, this downpayment, of your future inheritance, that Jesus, the Son, is sharing with you. It’s not just that we have the Spirit, but what the Spirit does is bring us into fellowship with the whole Body and Bride of Christ. He makes us one—one Spirit, one faith, one baptism, one Lord. We are one in the Spirit of God. So, yes, there is participation in the Spirit.

Yes, there is affection and sympathy. There is a heart of mercy. God’s heart of mercy and His lovingkindness have been poured out. The overflow of that has been poured out on us. That’s why we are saved. That’s why we are Christians—because of His heart of mercy. And earlier in chapter 1, Paul said, “That’s how I love you guys. I pray in joy because of your faith and your sanctification, and I love you guys. In fact, I love you with the affection of Christ.” Remember, Spencer broke down that word “affection”—it’s the *bowels* of Christ—this deep, intense affection and feeling that Christ has for us. It had overflowed to Paul and because it had overflowed to Paul he loved them that same way. He is saying that we have that and, therefore, we should have that for one another. So, Paul says, because of all of this, verse 2,

“…complete my joy….”

Bring my joy to maturity and to the fullness, by being—listen to this—

“…of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”

“Full accord and of one mind” is really just one word that means something like oneness of Spirit and thought. He just keeps saying it over and over. What’s he harping on? One mind, one Spirit, unity, unity, unity….be one, be one. It’s a command. Paul is saying, “Because we have this in Christ, if you care at all that God loves you in Christ, and that you’ve been set free. No matter what you go through, and whatever trials, the Spirit of God has sealed you and you can’t be taken away from that. Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing can separate you from that love. If that means anything to you then be one, be one, be united. Love each other. Have the same mind. Have this mind in you. Think this way. Think this way toward each other.” What way? Verse 3,

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

Think this way. Have this mind. Don’t do anything out of selfish ambition or conceit. Selfish ambition or rivalry. I think that’s from an older version of the ESV.[[53]](#footnote-53) I don’t know, but rivalry and selfish ambition have the idea that I would do anything at the cost of you to get ahead. It’s that I would grasp for whatever I wanted, whatever I thought would bring me glory or honor, at the cost of you. I am fine with that if it promotes me. Paul says don’t do that. Don’t think that way. Don’t think about people that way. Don’t look at people that way. Don’t consider people lower than yourself as just something that you would step on to raise yourself up. He says don’t do that. Don’t have this conceit. Literally, it’s “vainglory” or “empty glory.” As human beings, any time we grasp for glory for ourselves, or for honor, for esteem, or for attention, it’s empty and meaningless. It’s grasping for the wind. Why? We weren’t made for it and we can’t handle it. It’s bigger than us. There is only One who is worthy of it and there is only One who has it, so to grasp for that is to try to rob that, and at its core that’s satanic. This is what Satan did, right? He grasped for the throne of God. As a created angel and the most glorious being that God had made, he grasped for the throne of God. He wanted it all and it led to his fall, and in his rebellion he was cast out of Heaven. This is our Fall. This is Eve grasping for the knowledge of good and evil and taking the fruit. This is Adam grasping the lie and biting into the lie that he could be God. It didn’t bring exaltation and it didn’t bring glory. It brought sin, and death, and destruction, and damnation. It brought death and separation between us and our God. It brought death in relationships within humanity. So, it makes unity so hard. It’s what makes what he is about to say to us so difficult. Because it’s not natural. What is now natural, because of the poison of the lie that we bit into, is selfish ambition, and vain conceit, and empty glory, and grasping at things that don’t belong to me, and thinking things about people that I shouldn’t. Seeing them as lower than myself. Having rivalry in my heart against them. We have these battles that take place in our hearts and our minds and our little private worlds that happen in here. But all of that matters. The way that we think about each other matters. Because if we are not of one mind, and we are not in one accord, if affection and sympathy don’t overflow out of our hearts toward one another, even in the way that we think about each other, let alone how we speak and act, but even in the way you think about each other, it will destroy the unity of Red Oak, and we won’t advance in the Gospel, and we won’t advance the Gospel beyond these walls. It won’t happen. It will destroy our unity because God resists the proud.

My brother posted a Spurgeon quote that says this,

“If any man thinks ill of you do not be angry with him for you are worse than he thinks you to be.”

That’s encouraging, isn’t it? It’s true. Harry said that to me the other day. I said, “Man, that guy called me a jerk,” and Harry said, “Imagine if he really knew you.” He didn’t really. But, I wonder if this was a quote from a sermon or if this was a quote from something like a counseling session? Thanks, Charles. But, for real, like, even in our own minds, we get so offended when somebody knows how bad we are. They just know us a little bit, but we are worse. We know what we are in our own minds. You don’t want a window or a door into here, right? Unh-uh. It’s scary in our own little worlds what we think about each other and our pretend rivalries that we have toward other people. When somebody says something to you, you think, “What do you mean by that?” If you at least have the decency to ask him what he meant by that it wasn’t what you really thought, but in your mind you had built this whole argument to how they were attacking your character and how they were slighting you. Why? Why did you think that? You thought they were thinking that way because you think that way. They were probably lying to you when you asked them and they really were thinking that—I don’t know. That—that is selfish ambition and empty glory. It will destroy our unity, and destroy our witness, and we won’t advance the Gospel. So, Paul is commanding them. He’s throwing it down. Be of one mind, and one Spirit. Be likeminded. Think this way.

“…but in humility count others more significant than yourselves…”

In humility. In lowliness. There are different words for humility and this one means lowly or humble thinking. It means humility of thought and having a lowly and right view of yourself; not too high, but this isn’t self-hatred. This is honoring others and loving others above yourself. This is counting others more significant than yourself. So, Paul says “consider”—think about other people as better than yourself. That’s hard, right? What’s he saying? Is he saying, “Think that Shawn is better looking than you. Think that Crocker is funnier than you. Think that Smalls is smarter than you.”? Is that what he’s telling me to do and I just have to think these things beyond any facts or beyond what I perceive? These are my good friends so we’re good. Is that what Paul is saying? No, that would be to miss the point. This isn’t about who is the best athlete in the room, and who’s the funny guy, and who is the best at this or that. That’s missing the point. What he’s getting at is thinking about other people as better than yourself, in humble, lowly thinking, so that we see and consider people of being worthy of our service, of our love, and of our consideration. Not just thinking about my life, my interests, how I’m going to live, how I’m going to get by, and by how I’m going to provide for my family, and persevere faithfully to the end; I’m not just thinking about myself but I’m strategic in thinking about others. In order to do that we have to get to a place where our thoughts are humble enough to see each other as worthy of being served. Because, in your heart of hearts, if you think that you are better than people, if you see yourself as higher than them, and you see them as unworthy of your time, and your attention, and your affection, you won’t serve them. You will think lowly of them and highly of yourself, and that’s satanic—it’s demonic. We won’t be unified and we won’t serve this community with the Gospel, because we won’t be serving each other with the Gospel. So, Paul is saying, “Think this way—see other people as better than yourselves.”

“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

So, verse 5,

“Have this mind among yourselves,…”

Among the Church. He’s not just talking to one person. He’s saying to think this way among yourselves. Have this mind. What mind?

“…which is yours in Christ Jesus.”

So, it needs to be read this way. It says,

“Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus,”

and he’s about to launch into the example of Jesus as humble service. He’s about to launch into the example about how Jesus considered us better than himself, and so He served us. He became a servant. He humbled himself. But, to do that we have to understand the distinction of Jesus’ starting point, right? We don’t have the same starting point as Jesus. But, he says, “Have this mind.” I think the New American Standard Version gets closer to what this means in the original language. The NASV reads this way,

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”

So, he’s saying to think the way that Jesus thought. In the Church, in Red Oak, think the same way about each other as Jesus thought about us. Then, he goes into how Jesus thought about us and what that meant for us.

Let me read this to you real quick. One translator said it this way,

“Let the same kind of humble thinking dominate you as it dominated Christ Jesus.”

In Romans 15:3, the Messiah “did not please himself.” Jesus himself said,

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”[[54]](#footnote-54)

That’s Mark 10. Listen to this from our little commentary[[55]](#footnote-55),

“Jesus did not consider being God grounds for getting or grasping but for emptying and forgiving.”

2 Corinthians 8:9,

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

Jesus had this humble thinking. Listen to this in verses 5-8,

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself…”

Let’s stop there. Jesus has this humble thinking. He thinks lowly. He considered us better than himself. Listen to me; this is huge. This didn’t start when He became a man. This scene starts in Heaven. This scene starts with Jesus on His throne. Do you see it?

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God…”

“Though He was in the form of God.” Though from all of eternity Jesus was in the form of God—the Son is God. The word “form” means His essential nature and characteristics. Jesus, by His nature, is God. But, He didn’t consider that something to be held on to—to be grasped. The humility started in Heaven. God—listen—God, our God, is humble. By His nature He is humble. I hope that’s not over your head or your mind is wandering. This has wrecked me. God is humble. He’s humble. Is He worthy of glory and does He demand glory? Yes. Does He demand worship? Yes. But think about this; even that God would create us. Did He create us because He was lonely? No. He is self-sufficient. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwelling together in perfect harmony, perfect peace, love, and communion forever—they did not need us. He, God, did not need us. The fact that He created us to be worshippers and the fact that He created us to live for His glory was out of His humility, so that you and I could share in that. He considered us. He didn’t have to consider us. He didn’t have to think of us.

“What is man that you are mindful of him,

and the son of man that you care for him?

5 Yet you have made him a little lower than the angels

and crowned him with glory and honor.”[[56]](#footnote-56)

You have put everything into subjection under our feet and we ruined it. We ruined it. So, we don’t see everything in subjection to humanity. It’s all turned upside down. But, in His humility He made us to share in His glory. It’s His humility that we would even be saved. If you are a believer tonight, it’s because He is humble and He considered you. It’s because He left His throne to save you. That’s what it means by “He emptied himself.” People get this wrong. Not so much anymore, but some people think that when Jesus emptied himself that at some point He stopped being God to become man. That’s a heresy. It has tons of names, but no, it’s not like He left any of the essential characteristics of what it means to be God. Listen to what the Bible says about Him. This is Hebrews 1, speaking of Jesus, the Son,

“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”

That’s who He has always been. Listen to John 1:1. You know this,

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

Jump down to verse 14,

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Jesus has always been God. He can’t cease to be God. It is who He is by His nature and His character—He is God. But, what Paul says is that He emptied himself, and then he tells us what it means that He emptied himself. Look at it. Philippians 2:6,

“Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself…”

And here it is—he tells us how He emptied himself. Not by ceasing to be God, but listen to what happened:

“…by taking the form (or the nature) of a servant.”

So, by being born. The first thing is that He took the form of a servant. That’s how He emptied himself. The second thing is,

“Being born in the likeness of men…”

Then, Paul says,

“And being found in human form….”

That’s how He emptied himself. He emptied himself by adding real humanity. He really became one of us. He identified with us. That’s how He emptied himself. He left the glory of Heaven. He left the worship He was due. What He let go of were the rights and privileges that He is worthy of—to sit on that throne in glory, with the Father and the Spirit, being worshipped by angels that cry out day and night (if there is day and night). They cry out all the time (if there is time). That’s what they do and that’s what they are. They cry out, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come again!!”[[57]](#footnote-57) He is worthy of that and He left it. He left it to add, to take on, to become one of us. He took the form of a servant. What does it mean? It means He became a real slave. He became a human slave; a bondservant. He came in the likeness of men. It means that He was really born like one of us. He was born just like us. His conception was a little different. His birth was just like ours. He was a real human being and a real baby. He took on humanity—the essence of it. He added it. Listen—in His humility, He came and rescued us. What kind of love is this? What kind of humility is this, that God, the one who spoke the universe into existence—that was His idea? It was His idea that the sky would be blue. It was His idea that gravity would be a thing, right? It was His idea that the Sun would exist and radiate heat and light to keep us alive. That plants would grow and bear fruit that we could eat and be sustained by, that was His idea. He created it. It was His idea and He sustains it. He is the radiance of the glory of God and He humbled himself and became a baby; a real baby in a real womb. What kind of humility is that?

We have a very different starting point than our God. He humbled himself and became a real baby, right? His mom was a teenage girl, feeding him; otherwise, He wouldn’t have made it. She cleaned Him because He couldn’t clean himself. She taught Him how to walk. God, in His humility, in His plan to come save us, had a teenage girl teach Him how to walk, and how to talk, and how to eat. He was a real human. He would get tired and have to sleep. And He served—Paul says He came in the likeness of a servant, of a slave.

Listen to this quote by F. F. Bruce about Jesus taking the form of a servant and in slavery having no rights or privileges. He had nothing to hold on to. Listen to this,

“Not that He (Jesus) exchanged the form of God for the form of a slave, but that He manifested the form of God in the form of a slave.”

I’m going to read that again. This is so good—listen to this:

“Not that He exchanged the form of God for the form of a slave, but that He manifested the form of God in the form of a slave.”

What does that mean? It means that God, in His humility, became a slave to show us who He is, in His self-revelation, so people would know who their God is. Because we lost it, right? We ruined it. We rebelled. We became enemies. We died. We abandoned our God to live the lie that we could be our own gods, and in order to rescue us and reveal himself back to us and show us who He is. He became the pinnacle of His self-revelation, and became a slave, a servant, to serve us.

We see this, right? John 13 is the best example. Remember when James and John were having a discussion about who was going to sit at Jesus’ right hand[[58]](#footnote-58)? They were grasping for position, grasping for power, grasping for rights, and privileges, and Jesus said,

“The one who will be great among you will need to be servant of all.”[[59]](#footnote-59)

Then, within a week, they were sitting in the Upper Room and they were going to have the Passover[[60]](#footnote-60). They were going to observe the Last Supper and no one was washing each other’s feet. It was like they missed it. They didn’t get it. No one was serving each other. No one was humbling himself. They were all thinking, “Well, Judas should wash my feet” or “Simeon should wash my feet,” while they were all sitting around with dirty feet. And Jesus—Jesus—God—Creator of the universe, and Sustainer of the universe, the only One worthy to be worship and to be glorified—eternal, infinite God—clothed in humanity, disrobes and wraps himself with a towel, and He gets down, and He washes their feet, to demonstrate to them, “This is what I’m talking about. If you are going to follow me and be like me, this is who I am. Your God is humble and He serves.” And His humble serving should humble us and free us from thoughts of rivalry, and selfish ambition, and seeking vainglory. It should free us to love and serve each other.

But, even the picture of Jesus washing the dirty feet of the disciples, was pointing to a greater service.

“Being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form,”

That means that He looked like a human, right? When people saw Jesus, there wasn’t something like a halo painted over His head. He wasn’t always sitting with crimped hair and gazing into the distance with a glowing ring around His head.[[61]](#footnote-61) He looked like a man in appearance and Paul is using this as proof. People thought Jesus was a man. And people make an error here and say, “Oh, He was really God. He just looked like a man but He wasn’t really.” No, in the words that Paul is using he is saying that Jesus took the exact nature of a man. He identified with us and what it means to be a human. He became one of us and that’s huge, because if we are ever to be identified with Him, He first had to identify with us, because we weren’t getting to Him on our own.

“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

He humbles himself to be born. He humbles himself by taking on humanity. He humbles himself to being a servant and He humbles himself to the point of death. God would die. The author of life would die. The one who spoke everything into existence by His word would die. He would lay down His life. It’s very clear; it says He humbled himself. He humbled himself. His humiliation wasn’t forced on Him. This was in love and to serve us.

What is Paul saying? “Have this mind”—Serve one another. Love one another. Consider others better than yourself, just like Jesus, who though He was God humbled himself to dying for you. Our infinite, eternal God would die. But not just death, and not just that He would die, but He would die a death on the cross. Death on the cross. I think it’s obvious here that Paul wants us to think through and wrestle with what this means—“even death on the cross.” There is the physical side of this—we know the story. I hope you do. On that same night that Jesus washed the dirt off of the disciples’ feet, and the same night that He broke the bread and said, “This is my body that is going to be broken for you,” and he poured the juice and said, “This is my blood that is poured out for you”[[62]](#footnote-62)—that same night, Jesus and His disciples left that room. They left the room and went out to the garden. They were going to camp out and spend the night. Satan had already put it into Judas’s heart to betray Jesus and he had left. When they went out to the garden, in order to get there they had to cross the Brook Kidron. This is significant and John throws it in there:

“When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.”[[63]](#footnote-63)

This is huge. This time of year was the Passover and they were killing a quarter of a million lambs, and goats, and bulls were being slaughtered in the Temple. That’s what was happening. Up on this hill, at the Temple, that was a lot of blood, and what they did is they designed the Temple in such a way that the blood would flow down into the Brook Kidron. So, at this time of year the Brook Kidron would swell and overflow its banks, but not with water. It would overflow its banks with the blood of lambs. Jesus, God, in the flesh, humbly serving us and considering us better than himself, would walk over the Book Kidron and look down and see and smell the blood of the lambs.

Remember how Jesus told his disciples, “Y’all, stay up and pray with me.” He told them, “I’m going to Jerusalem. They are going to take me, and beat me, and I’m going to be lifted up, and I’m going to die, but I’m coming back.” They don’t get it. They are falling asleep and Jesus is sweating blood because of the weight of what He knows is coming. This is why He came. This is His plan. To lay down His life and to go to the cross. He prays His prayer, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but your will be done.” What cup? What’s He talking about this “cup”? The cup of the wrath of God, right? That’s the picture throughout the Old Testament, that God’s wrath is being stored up in a cup to be poured out, to be drank, to be consumed. That’s our cup. That’s my cup. That’s my cup of wrath. I deserve to drink that wrath. That’s what I’m worthy of. If I am going to grasp at something—if I have some sort of right or privilege in this world—do you hear me?—if we have any rights, or privileges, or anything that belongs to us, or is owed to us, it is not attention, it’s not affection, it’s not worship or honor, it’s not being glorified—what is owed to us is a cup of wrath that would consume us forever. And Jesus says, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Not the cup of wrath that is for me, but for the sin of the world. Nevertheless, not my will by your will be done.” What kind of love and what kind of humility, to know that He doesn’t deserve that? He did nothing to deserve death. He did nothing to deserve wrath. He was obedient. He became obedient. As a human being, He learned obedience. As Savior, He learned obedience. He was righteous and He always obeyed. Every time, He honored the Father in everything. He deserved and He was worthy of love, and fellowship, and worship. He was worthy to return to the glory that He had with God before the foundation of the world. But, He said, “Nevertheless, not my will but your will be done.[[64]](#footnote-64)”

So, they come and they arrest Him and they take Him. There are a series of mock trials and He’s lied about. He’s spit on and He is beaten. All this time, He is upholding their lives. He’s the sustainer of the universe. Their heart is beating and their fist has the strength to strike Him because He says it is so and He gives them that strength. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, He is silent[[65]](#footnote-65). He doesn’t stand up for himself. He lets them lie, in His humility, to love us, and to save us. So, they take Him. You know the story. They take Him before Pilate and he has Him scourged, which means that professional torturers—it was their job to torture people—took a cat o’ nine tails or a flagrum, a whip with leather straps, and bone, and pieces of metal, and they ripped the flesh off of His back.

The Gospel writers don’t go into detail because the Gospel writers were writing to people who had seen these tortures, but Isaiah says that Jesus was beaten beyond the image of man. He was marred beyond human recognition. He didn’t look like a human being, they beat Him so badly. They ripped the flesh from His body. They mocked Him and they twisted the crown of thorns into His head. He was so beaten that when they put, most likely, the three-hundred-pound crossbeam on Him to carry to His place of crucifixion, He physically couldn’t do it, so they brought in Simon to help Him carry it. And Jesus bears up underneath the weight of the cross and He goes to Calvary where He would be crucified. The Romans had perfected the crucifixion torture to death. They put nails through His feet and through His wrists. – This is God. This is God.

When Paul says, “Think like this”—don’t forget where we started. Be one. Be one. Don’t think bad thoughts about each other, love each other. In Christ, love each other. If there is any encouragement, if there is any comfort from this love—what love? The love that God would become one of us and go to the cross, having all power, and all authority, and He could have called on a legion of angels to stop it[[66]](#footnote-66), but He humbled himself, and He subjected himself to crucifixion because He loves you. If there is any encouragement for you in that, and if that comforts you at all in whatever trial you are going through, or that you think that you are going through—if there is any comfort from that, if there is any affection, if there is any participation in the Spirit of God who has come to live inside of you because of this story—then be likeminded. Love each other. Serve each other.

It is no big thing for one human to serve another. Why? We are all worthy of death and we have all received grace through this story because Jesus goes to the cross and He lets sinful men nail Him to a piece of wood. The reason why the cross is so horrible is not because of the physical suffering that Jesus experienced. That’s awful. It’s horrific. We don’t have words, or thoughts, or smells to bring to our minds what Jesus went through physically. We can’t comprehend it. The people who saw it didn’t fully comprehend it. Only those who died by crucifixion would have a glimpse of what Jesus suffered. But that is not why Paul says, “He humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross.” The reason why Paul emphasizes “even death on a cross,” is because to die on the cross was to absorb the curse of mankind. Because—“Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.” Deuteronomy[[67]](#footnote-67). The curse of the cross was that God the Father, made Him, God the Son, who knew no sin, to become sin for our sake, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. So that on the cross, God the Father sees Jesus as guilty of your sin and my sin, and He pours out the cup of wrath and Jesus drains it. He consumes it and drinks every drop. Whew!! On my own, I would drink it forever and would never satisfy the cup of God’s wrath. And Jesus drained it. He is consumed by it and God dies—Jesus dies. Remember, Jesus cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?[[68]](#footnote-68)” God pours out His wrath on His Son because He sees Him, He considers Him, and He thinks of Him as guilty of our sin, and Jesus dies—God dies. Because He’s humble—because He’s humble. He thinks of us as better than himself, and we are not—you’re not, and I’m not. Are you better than me or am I better than you? It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter. That’s not the point. The point is that God, who is greater than all, who alone is worthy, and who is perfect—He considered us better than himself, to the point of taking our sin, and our death, and our Hell, so that we could have His forgiveness, and His love, and His grace, and His fellowship, and His encouragement, and His comfort, and His love. And we could have fellowship with each other, and we could be of one mind, we could have His mind, and that individually together we could think this way.

I need to serve them. I need to love them. I need to stir them up to love and good works. I need to invest in them, being faithful to the end. I need to invest in their families. I need to invest in this conversation—that we would serve each other. It’s impossible apart from the work of Christ, but because of His life, and death, and resurrection, He can be our example. He is our example that we are to follow; that we would see each other the same way and that we would love each other the same way.

Listen to this quote from Martin Luther. He’s the second smartest Luther I know. He said this,

“You, O Lord Jesus Christ, are my righteousness and I am your sin. You have taken what was mine, and have in room of it given me what was yours. What you were not,…you did become, in order that I might become and remain what at one time I was not.”

Jesus humbled himself by becoming a human. He humbled himself by becoming a baby. He humbled himself by becoming a servant. He humbled himself by becoming a thief, a liar, a rapist, a homosexual—you name it and He became it on the cross. He became the object of God’s divine wrath so that we could become His righteousness, His obedience, and His goodness, and so that we could have all that we have in Christ Jesus for all of eternity.

“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

We are to have this kind of thinking, right?

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”

Think the same way Jesus thought. That is only possible if you and I preach this Gospel to ourselves. Why do we keep saying that? Why do we say that in almost every service? Why does that keep coming up? Because if Jesus just saved us and we would somehow be what we are supposed to be, Paul wouldn’t say, “Be like this.”

We have a responsibility here and here’s where it comes in. I heard John Piper say it this way; that we should be encouraged that we are told to think this way, because it’s not natural. It’s not going to come naturally, so if we neglect it we won’t be it. But how it works is that the Spirit of God would take in His hand the Word of God and daily, daily renew us to who we truly are. We do have this in Christ. If you are in Christ you have this comfort, you have this encouragement, you have this love. You have it in Christ, but if we cut ourselves off from the Word of God we will cut ourselves off from the Spirit of God, and we won’t be the people of God that He has made us to be. So, if we are going to be likeminded, and we are going to be united, and if you and I are going to advance the Gospel, then we need to be reminded of the humility of Christ, because the humility of Christ will unify us, and because we will be humbled, and we will serve each other with the Gospel.

For some of you—please listen to me—some of you need to repent and cry out for Jesus to save you, because you are not following Him. What you are grasping and holding onto is death. You don’t serve other people; you serve yourself. And the sin that you would hold onto, and that you would have a white-knuckled death grip on—your preference for how you live out your sexuality, what you do with your time, and your thoughts, and your energy, and your money—you grab hold of that and you don’t let go. You are holding on to death. Jesus, who is worthy of all glory, let go of everything that He had a right to, to come rescue you. Please repent and let go of that. Repent. He is not telling you to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. He’s saying to let go and repent, and trust, and believe in the life, and the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, because it did not end with Him in the grave. It did not end with Him absorbing Hell so we could go free. It ends with Him rising again and He is seated right now in the heavenly places, restored to the glory that He had with His Father before the foundation of the world. You need to believe and trust in Jesus.

I’ll say this. If you are not a believer, if you are not a Christian, would you please, tonight, repent, and believe, and trust in Christ. We have a number of pastors, and deacons, and godly folks in this church who would love to talk to you. If you come forward while we are singing, we usually don’t do that, but I’d personally love to talk to you about the Gospel. There are a lot of people in this room who would. So, I’m going to pray and then our band is going to come up, and we are going to worship Jesus by singing, because He is worthy of it.

Pray with me.

Lord God, we love you. God, I thank you for the Gospel. Thank you, Lord Jesus, and God, that you are a humble God. Thank you that you would share your glory with us and that you would let us see your glory, and participate in your glory, and that you would come rescue us when we were so unworthy. When we were guilty, and we were sinful, you came and you laid down your life. I pray that, right now, that by that message that you would rescue men and women in this room, and bring them to repentance and faith. Humble them. Lord, you say that you give grace to the humble but you resist the proud[[69]](#footnote-69). I pray that you would humble us. I pray that as a church, as Red Oak, that we would be united and that we would be of one mind, one heart, one spirit, one Gospel, one message, one fellowship, and that our unity would proclaim the goodness of your Gospel to this community and to the world, and that you would use us to advance the Gospel. I pray this in Christ’s name.

(Shawn Clark)

I love how the Word of God is changing me and shaping me. I pray that the same is happening in your life. And like Rob said tonight, if you don’t know Jesus, and that is not happening in your life, I pray that that would change. I’m thankful for the Word of God. Thank you, Rob, for how you handled the Word tonight. I love that we get to do this. I get excited about this. I get excited about small groups. I get excited about the lunch meetings that we have when we get to talk about life, and we get to talk about the Gospel. I love it. I love that tonight we will have 230 kids come in here and we will get to preach the Gospel again. Y’all need to be praying for them. Pray for Brody as he preaches tonight. Pray for our staff. Also, if you haven’t read it, we have two of our ladies that we sent over to South Asia, to be with Taylor. Y’all be praying for them. We will be sending two more in about a week and we will keep updating you guys. But y’all be praying. Be praying for each other. I love y’all and I love this church.

I want to read and end tonight out of Philippians 4. Paul says,

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Go in peace. I love y’all. Goodnight.

September 11, 2016

Philippians 2:9-13

Spencer Davis

Hey, everybody. Everybody doing well? Good. Welcome to Red Oak if you’ve never been here before. If you have been here a lot, welcome as well. I really appreciate the song selection tonight, Adam and the other guys. It was emotional knowing the passage that we are going to be in tonight and singing those songs about “Crown Him With Many Crowns” and the others that were just so appropriate. Because we are going to be in Philippians 2, beginning with verse 9. We are going to read through verse 13, but the portion that the songs went so well with are the first couple of verses, Philippians 2:9-11.

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Amen. What is going to be really cool is to one day be singing praises to God next to our brothers and sisters in some of the places where we have missionaries overseas. For those of you who are new, we are partnering together with a believer in (undisclosed location). He comes from a Muslim people group and as of a year ago he was the only known believer in this people group, but now there are sixteen or so believers spread out among three different people groups, and there are four in this one Muslim people group.

So, thinking about that, and thinking about the scene around the throne, I want to look back at John 1. You don’t have to turn there; I’m just going to read it. I want to think back to last week, when Rob was talking about Philippians 2, and Christ emptying himself and making himself nothing. Here’s John 1,

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him.”

Now, this is talking about Jesus. If I can pause and step out of the Bible for a second, this is talking about Jesus. In the beginning was Jesus. Jesus was God and He made everything that was made. Jesus did. Jesus made all things that were made. All things were made through Him and without Him was not anything made that was made.

“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Skip down to verse 14.

“And the Word…”

…the One who made everything…

“… became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Skip down to verse 16,

“For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”

And the verse he preached from last week was in Philippians 2. We just walk through books of the Bible here, so we are just working through Philippians. So, Rob read the verses last week,

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus…”

Then it tells us what Jesus left behind. Remember, He is God and He made everything, and He is on the throne, and then the Word became flesh…became a baby…became a helpless baby. He subjected himself to having his diaper changed, to getting tired, to getting hungry, to needing something physically. How does that all work? He is God and He needs something? The incarnation is hard to understand, which is good. There is nothing in this world that we fully understand. I don’t fully understand those lights, this church, this podium—name anything. How do the molecules hold together in anything? I don’t really know. Then, some of us face these hard problems, like, “I don’t get how the incarnation fits together. How can Jesus be God and still need something? I don’t get it so I’m done. I’m out.” But, what do you understand fully? Nothing. We don’t understand anything fully but we’re okay with it. I don’t understand sandwiches but I’m okay eating them. There is so much in this world that we don’t get so, of course, we don’t get the intricacies of how it works that Jesus is fully God and fully man, incarnate, in the flesh, in a body.

This says,

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God…”

…though He was God on the throne…

“…did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,…”

…God on His throne, taking the form of a servant…

“…being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

So, God lowered himself to a level that we never could. God became a man—a baby at first. But He didn’t lower himself to the level of the best of men, although that would have been a huge demotion, right? He lowered himself, not to a king, not to a warrior, but to the lowest of men. So, God lowered himself to being a man—not just a man but to the lowest of men, a servant. Not just that, but this says that He lowered himself to the point of death, which He didn’t earn. But not just to the point of death, but He lowered himself to the lowest of deaths. Deuteronomy and Galatians both tell us that “cursed is anybody who is hung on a tree.”[[70]](#footnote-70) So, God, who is on His throne in unapproachable light—all glory and praise to God—lowers himself all the way down to the lowest of men and to death, accursed on a cross. He lowers himself to the lowest point. But He didn’t stay dead. There’s a huge reversal that takes place and it happens quickly in the Scripture. That’s what we are going to read about tonight, this reversal that takes place almost immediately.

Jesus’ humility was kind of in stages; God to man, man to the lowest of men, the lowest of men to death, and death to the lowest of deaths. But then it says in verse 9,

“Therefore…”

In light of all that he’s said already, in light of Christ humbling himself and in light of Christ’s death…

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name...”

And it will go on to tell us, in the next couple of verses,

“…So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The commentators named Martin and Hawthorne say this,

“The cry, ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’ is the response of faith and celebrates His role as Christ the conqueror. Even as the demons acknowledge. The first part of this passage is a great sweep from the highest height to the lowest depth, from the light of God to the darkness of death, but at this point there’s a radical change in the hymn. Now comes the reversal. Whereas, the first half spoke of the unnamed Christ as the acting subject of all verbs, now in the last half it is God who acts, and Christ is the object of divine action. Whereas, the first half of the hymn described Christ’s humiliation the last half describes His exaltation by God, followed by His enthronement in the heavenly court.”[[71]](#footnote-71)

God on His throne lowered himself to become the lowest of men. Why did He do that? Because He loves you. Let it sink in for a second. This passage is too rich for anyone to preach well. This passage is too good for anybody to convey the message well. The Holy Spirit is going to have to draw the lines to your heart to make you feel this. God on His throne became the lowest of men because He loves you. Because of His own glory? Absolutely. And because He loves you. Then, He didn’t stay dead but was raised to the highest of heights. God raised Him up.

This is a theme in the Scriptures, that whoever is humbled is then exalted. In Matthew 23, it says,

“Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. 11But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

Matthew 18:4 says,

“Whoever humbles himself like (a) child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

1 Peter 5:5-6,

“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”

So, humble yourself and you will be exalted…humble yourself and you’ll be exalted. You hear this all throughout, but it’s not a promise. It’s more in the proverbs category; these are generalities but they’re not promises. Because, a lot of times I think we read these verses we are confused because we expect that if we are humbled and living a humble life here that we will be exalted here on Earth, but Christ wasn’t exalted here on Earth. That’s yet to come, right? We will be exalted in the life to come. So,

“Therefore, God has highly exalted Him.”

This word is really cool. It’s the only time the word is used in the New Testament for “highly exalted.” God does the action here, but the word used for “exaltation”--this is the only time it’s used. It’s two words put together. The one word is “exalted” and we see that word a lot in the Bible, but the word that it adds to the front is the word we get “hyper” from. It’s like “over” or “super” or “extra.” So, it’s like the verse is saying, “Therefore, God has hyper-exalted Jesus—has super-exalted Jesus—has way beyond ‘exalted’ exalted Jesus.” It’s the highest of high.

This is used in the Septuagint. If you don’t know, the Septuagint is like probably what Peter and these guys would have read the Old Testament as. It’s a Greek translation of the Old Testament. Does that make sense? So, when I talk about the Septuagint, that is the Greek version of the Old Testament that these guys would have read. The Septuagint uses this word that means super-exalt or hyper-exalt to describe Yahweh. It says Yahweh is exalted far above all gods. Yahweh is super-exalted or hyper-exalted above all others. So, it says that God has hyper-exalted Christ.

Now, we see that God does the action here. God has exalted Him far above all gods. The commentator M. J. Harris says,

“The resurrection proclaims ‘He lives - and that forever’, the exaltation proclaims ‘He reigns - and that forever.”

Christ was raised from the dead by God. So, here we see that He is exalted by God. We see that God did the action of raising Christ in Acts 3:15, where it says,

“And you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.”

1 Peter 1:19-21 says this,

“But with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”

Colossians 2:12 says that God raised Christ from the dead,

“Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”

You see it all throughout Scripture that God raised Christ from the dead. So, just like God raised Christ from the dead, it is God who exalts Christ the Son. Now, this is confusing. How can Jesus be God and God is exalting Jesus? It’s the incarnation. It’s hard to understand. We have to remember Deuteronomy 29:29 whenever we are studying anything difficult. Deuteronomy 29:29—I’m going to paraphrase it but you should look it up when you are studying difficult things. It says something like, “The secret things belong to Yahweh, but the things that are revealed belong to us and our children forever.”[[73]](#footnote-73) So, there are some things that belong only to Yahweh. We don’t know what they are. But the things that are revealed in Scripture are ours. We get to keep those. We get to study those and hang onto those.

So, how does the incarnation fit together? I don’t know. That’s one of the secret things that belong to Yahweh. But, I do know what the Scriptures say here; that God raised Jesus and God exalts Jesus. So, this is a quick exaltation. God exalts Jesus—highly exalts, super-exalts Him—and bestows on Him the name that is above every name.

This is awesome. The word for “bestows” or “given”—“given Him a name that is above every name”—can be translated “graciously given” because the word for ‘grace’ is in there. So, what’s the name? It says that God has exalted Him and given Him a name that is above every name, so at this name of Jesus—it seems pretty central—name, name, name, name. What’s the name of Jesus? Because in the Old Testament, especially, but all throughout the Bible, names are really, really important. They are a lot more important than our names. When we name our kids, sometimes we just name them what’s trendy, or what’s fun, or whatever. We named our daughter Alani, which means orange tree. That’s it. There’s no spiritual significance to that; it just means orange tree, but I like the name. We like the name and that’s great. But in the Old Testament there is a lot more significance to names. With some of them, there’s almost like a prophetic wind that blows through these names in the Old Testament. I’ll list a few of them. It’s said that a name reveals the inner being or the true nature of the people.

Here are some of the names: Able, of Cain and Able—his name meant ‘breath’. His life was over quickly. He was aptly named. Abraham—‘father of many’. Aachan’s name meant ‘trouble’ and rightly so. Cain’s name is the funniest in the Scripture to me; his name means ‘gotten.’ It’s like ‘I got one.’ He was the first kid that Adam and Eve had and she was like, “I got a man. I got one,” and she named him ‘I got one.’ That’s really great. So, Cain’s name is ‘gotten’ or ‘I have gotten a man.’ Cephas, who was Peter, meant ‘rock.’ Jacob’s name was ‘supplanter.’ Joshua, we know, was the same as Jesus, which meant ‘Yahweh is salvation.’ There are so many good names in the Bible. They are so important and in the Scripture they kind of tell us the true nature of a person.

So, when it is talking about the name of Jesus here, it’s important to think about what name it’s talking about. If you look at verse 10, it says,

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

By the way it’s structured, it doesn’t really sound like all creation will bow at the name ‘Jesus.’ Because what language would they pronounce it in? Would it be like the Greek pronunciation of Jesus? I don’t know. But this says, rather, “at the name of Jesus”—at the name that is given by the Father to Jesus. Now, the thing is, when we see Jesus on His throne again, in the book of Revelation, He has a ton of names. He goes by Jesus. He goes by The Faithful and True, the Word of God, the Son of Man, the Lamb, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords. There are so many names. Why? Because one name can’t do it. One name can’t encapsulate all that Jesus is. Right? No single word can capture the essence of Jesus, so it makes sense that an infinite God would have infinite names to describe Him. There are so many names describing God. Yes, that’s Him. Yes, that’s Him. He is God the All Powerful. He is Yahweh is Salvation. He is King of Kings. He is Lord of Lords. There are so many names because just one can’t encapsulate Him. But, there has always been mystery surrounding the name of God. Think about the ancient Old Testament name of God, YHWH. We don’t even know how it’s pronounced. We don’t know what vowels they put to that. We say ‘Yahweh’, assuming those are the vowels they put in there. Other names of God are really mysterious as well. He calls Himself the ‘I Am.’ There couldn’t be a more mysterious name than, “You tell them ‘I Am.’” There are so many names of God, and all of these names are starting to be copied by kings of this age. Xerxes used to call himself ‘King of Kings’ and a lot of the Pharaohs used to put on accolades of more and more names, but they could never live up to them.

So, what’s the name? Verses 9-11,

“Therefore God has (super exalted him) highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is….Lord.”

Is that it? Could that be the name? I think that could be what He’s saying. Because, if you think about that word ‘Lord’, is this the name that glorifies the Father? If you look at Isaiah 42:8, it says this,

“I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other.”

What a great verse.

“I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other.”

Now, the word that was used here originally was Yahweh.

“I am Yahweh; that is my name; my glory I give to no other.”

Yahweh. Now, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, translates this word kurios, which is Lord. I am the Lord. A lot of times, when you see kurios, it’s a translation of the Old Testament ‘Yahweh.’ A lot of times, when we are reading and we come across the word ‘Lord’ in the New Testament, we will say ‘Yahweh’ instead, because a lot of times that’s what kurios means. Now, that’s not all that kurios means, but it’s a translation of the Old Testament ‘Yahweh.’ So, is this saying that the name that is above every name, that God has exalted and bestowed on Christ, that that name is ‘Jesus equals Yahweh’? Every commentator I read said yes. Absolutely. Yes it is. Now, do we know for sure? No, because it’s not happened yet. It’s only in the future. But, at the name of Jesus, whichever one is revealed at that time—because He has a name written on His thigh that nobody knows except for Him[[74]](#footnote-74). Maybe it’s that one, right? But, whatever name is mentioned here, all will worship. Everyone, from all time—every tongue will agree with what the angels said in Luke 2, when they said,

“Unto us is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”

The One who saves. The Anointed One. Yahweh. The One who saves. The Anointed One. Lord. Every tongue will agree that Jesus=Messiah=Lord=Yahweh. All of the created order will bow before the name of Jesus that is above every name. So, is this name Jesus? Maybe. Is this name Messiah? Maybe. But it seems like it’s Lord. Is Paul specifically wanting us to see that kurios=Lord=Yahweh? This is getting a little nerdy, but I want you to see this, alright? Isaiah 45. This is a really important verse as you are thinking, “How can I understand this well?” Isaiah 45:22-24 says this. This is the Old Testament, right? This verse is good.

“Turn to me and be saved,

all the ends of the earth!”

This is the Old Testament God. A lot of times we think of the Old Testament God as being a God of wrath, but He’s saying,

“Turn to me and be saved,

all the ends of the earth!

For I am God, and there is no other.

23 By myself I have sworn;

from my mouth has gone out in righteousness

a word that shall not return:”

And here’s that word. This is what Paul is quoting from,

“‘To me every knee shall bow,

every tongue shall swear allegiance.’

24 “Only in Yahweh, it shall be said of me,

are righteousness and strength;

to him shall come and be ashamed

all who were incensed against him.

25 In the Lord (in Yahweh) all the offspring of Israel

shall be justified and shall glory.”

Think through the verse with me for a second. He is saying, “Turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth! … To me every knee shall bow, and every tongue will swear allegiance, and here is what they will say,

“Only in Yahweh, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength.”

Then, two groups of people come to Him:

“To Him shall come and be ashamed all who were incensed against Him…”

…and…

“All the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory.”

This is saying that one day every knee will bow before Yahweh—some in shame and some in glory. But every knee will bow before Yahweh. This is the passage that Paul is quoting from. Who will they bow before? Jesus. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Yahweh. Jesus is in charge. He is the Messiah. He is the Faithful and True. He is the King of Kings and He is the Lord of Lords. This passage links Him—and this is a huge deal for a Pharisee like Paul to say, “Jesus is Yahweh.” For a Pharisee to say that? He just stoned a guy for saying that. It’s a huge deal for him to say, “Every knee will bow.”

Think about this,

“So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

When will this happen? Because it’s obviously not happening today. Jesus is already exalted, but the bowing of every knee is yet to come. Does this mean that every knee will bow? It does. As Isaiah 45 told us, some in shame and some in glory. But that means that my knee will bow and my tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Your knee will bow, even if you are not a Christian. Even if you are against God, one day, the Bible says, your knee will bow to God and your tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, Jesus is Messiah, Jesus is Yahweh. Maybe it will be to your shame and maybe it will be to glory, but every knee—every American in history, every Asian and every African that has ever lived—will bow and say that Jesus Christ is Lord. This means that Donald Trump will bow and say, “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Hillary Clinton, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Osama bin Laden, Jed Davis, Moses Holloway—every knee will bow and every tongue will confess—Drake’s knee, Rihanna’s tongue will confess, “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Every knee will bow. It’s crazy to think about.

Some commentators will try to dumb it down and say that every knee might confess, but the wording is clear, every knee will admit, and proclaim, and confess. That’s what the word “confess” means. It means to admit, to give thanks, to give praise, to confess, or to proclaim. Everyone in Heaven—this includes all the angels and all the unseen creatures—maybe angels and demons. And on the Earth—this is all earthly creation from all time. And under the Earth—maybe this is talking about Satan and demons, or maybe it’s talking about the dead, or both. But everybody in all of history, in all of angelic history, will bow and confess, “Jesus Christ is Yahweh. Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

This lifting up of Christ doesn’t cause rivalry, it causes glory. That’s the context of this passage. He’s saying, “Don’t have rivalry among yourselves. Don’t have this empty glory. But have the mind in you, which is yours in Christ Jesus. You should consider everybody else better than you. You should look after other people’s needs, not your own.” This is saying that Christ’s glorification brings glory to the Father, not rivalry to the Father.

When I think about this passage I think about how is it that every knee could bow and every tongue could confess. Think about when an angel of God appears to anybody. What happens? They are freaked out. These people cry, yell, fall down on their faces, and worship the angels. When an angel, a servant-messenger, appears—when a servant-messenger of Yahweh appears—people who are in rebellion to God fall flat on their faces and start worshipping the angels. Can you imagine when, not the captain of all angels but the Maker of all angels appears, and not in human form but in all of His glory—let your imagination go there. I pray the Holy Spirit will cause your imagination to go there. Imagine the scene that one day everything will be put right. When everyone sees Yahweh—when they see Jesus on the throne—they will bow and confess—some in glory and happiness and some because they can’t resist it. Imagine the scene that everything will be put right one day. Every knee will do what knees are designed to do—bow. Every tongue will say the words that tongues were created for, “Jesus is Yahweh! Jesus is Lord!” Imagine that every eye is pointed in the direction that eyes were meant to be pointed. All worship and praise and glory to God.

Now, Paul builds to this point, and look where he crashes. Verse 12, he says,

“Therefore…”

In light of this—in light of the fact that Jesus was highest of high and became the lowest of low then was raised back to highest of high and everyone is going to worship Him—in light of that fact—in light of Jesus on the throne—in verse 12 he says, “Obey.” It’s so simple: Do what God says to do. It’s so convicting. To think how lightly I take my obedience. How lightly do I take following simply—following Jesus, reading the Bible, growing in Christ, and doing what He says.

You know, it’s easy to tell your children to do this and do that. We tell our kids, “I’m happy that you want to help out around the house, but I’d be happier if you’d obey.” This says that, in light of what Christ has done, obey Him.

“Therefore, my beloved…”

“Therefore, those that I love,” Paul says. In light of this,

“…as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

As you’ve always obeyed…obey. Here’s the thing—Christ’s obedience enables our obedience. Christ’s triumph enables our obedience. Paul says, “Listen, you’ve always obeyed while I’ve been there.” They obeyed the initial call to salvation. Brody, in the initial sermon we did on Philippians, was talking about Lydia, and the Philippian jailer, and the girl, and how they came and obeyed the initial call to salvation. They obeyed that and they’ve obeyed God ever since, and Paul is saying, “Don’t just obey while I’m there. Obey while I’m gone.”

My first job ever was at Below The Knee Shoe Store in Columbus, Georgia. It wasn’t a chain. A guy in my church owned it and hopefully he doesn’t listen to our podcasts. I had just gotten a car and this was my first job ever, and my dad sits me down and gives me this speech. Now, I’d done jobs for him around the house before, and a couple of smaller jobs, but this was my first big-boy job where you drive to it yourself and you have to show up on time and all of that. So, my dad gave me a speech where he said, “Listen, when you go to work, some people will only work while the boss is looking.” I was like, “Really?,” because I’d never experienced that. He said, “Some people will only work while the boss is looking, but you…” and he read me the verse about working heartily for the Lord and not for men[[75]](#footnote-75). Then he said, “But you…you work for Jesus, so your boss never leaves the room. So, you need to always work. You can’t cheat your boss while He’s in the room with you. So, work heartily as unto the Lord.” And I remembered that. So, people who worked at Below The Knee Shoe Store hated me, because when it was slow they’d be like, “Alright, let’s watch the game,” but I’d go over to Mr. J and say, “Mr. J, what can I do?” He’d be like, “Uh, straighten up the stock in the back room?,” and I’d be like, “Great.” And I’d be straightening up shoeboxes in the back room and the other guys finally came to me and said, “You’ve gotta like chill because you’re making us look bad and we want to watch the game.” But, I was sixteen years old and I was like, “No, I’ve got to work heartily.” I really wanted to work.

So, this is what Paul’s saying. He’s saying, “Don’t just obey when I’m around. While I’m gone, keep obeying. You have obeyed and I’m proud of that. You’re my beloved. You’re the ones that I love. I’ve seen your obedience. Keep it up. Keep obeying the Lord, in light of all that I’ve just told you.” Because the context of this is obedience within the body and getting along together with one another. But here, he says a confusing phrase; he says this,

“So now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence,…”

…Not just when I’m there but while I’m gone, too…

“…work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

What does that mean? That’s a big verse. If you just read that portion of the verse you might quit. You might be done. Because the picture it just painted us was that God is in His heavens, all eyes are on Him, every knee will bow, every tongue will confess, so you better get to work, and be scared, and tremble. But what is he saying? Because there is grace in there. If that’s where the verse ended it would be terrifying. God is enthroned so tremble and do what He says. But that’s not where the verse ends, because it says, “Because God works in you.”

What grace! Think about this. God is on His throne and He demands obedience from you, but good news: He’s going to come inside of you and change you from within, and help you. This is simple truths tonight but it’s so good. God is going to help you. When Paul says, “Work out your own salvation” to the Philippians, he is writing to believers. They already have salvation. Remember in verse 1 that he is writing to the saints who are in Christ Jesus. That phrase he uses a hundred sixty four times. There is no question as to who he is writing to. He’s writing to saints, to believers, the holy ones in Christ. This isn’t like a salvation checkup. These guys are saved. They’ve already been obedient to the initial call of salvation. “To the saints who are in Christ Jesus.” And Paul’s theology / God’s truth doesn’t lend to the idea that you can lose your salvation. The Bible doesn’t preach that, okay? He talks about this in Philippians 1:6, where he says,

“He who began a good work in you will be faithful to bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

At the day when every knee will bow. God’s going to be faithful. If He starts it He’s going to finish it. So, what is he saying, because this word really does mean salvation? “Work out your salvation.” Who does the work of salvation? God does. God does the work of salvation. Paul has already laid that groundwork. If you look at Philippians 1:27-28,

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ,…”

If the verse ended there, good luck.

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This (your obedience) is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”

“From God”—Where does salvation come from? From God. Your salvation comes from God. So, God does the work of salvation. It’s clear. But here, Paul is saying that we are to join in the work through the power that God is already working in us. God is at work in us and we are to, by the power of the Spirit—not on our own—by the power of the Spirit, we are to become who we already are. We are to become who we are. We believe that true believers will bear true fruit and we will be worked on by God to work for God. That’s what verses 1:27-28 say. The Philippians’ standing firm for the Gospel is evidence of salvation; it’s not the cause of their salvation. We talked about this a couple of weeks ago when I spoke about Jed and that illustration. But their obedience shows that they are saved—their obedience doesn’t save them. You can’t do enough good works to save yourself, because left on our own we don’t do good. Right? We will come back to that in a second.

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

Does it really mean fear and trembling? Should we fear God? Yes, we should. We should fear God. There are a few reasons. Number one, because God is holy and we are not. God is light. The second reason is that because God is holy, God is wrathful toward sin. You can see that back as far as the Fall. God actually does punish sin. Even in His sons, God disciplines those who are His sons. But, you can see that Hell for unbelievers is God’s wrath against sin. So, there are reasons to fear God; because God is holy and God punishes sin. The third reason is that God is all-powerful. He can do anything He wants to do. That’s reason enough; God is all-powerful. The fourth reason is because God sustains every creature at every moment. All of creation is contingent upon His power. Take a breath—God did that. God is keeping you alive minute by minute. There’s a reason to fear God. Number five, God ordains, carries out, and sustains the work of salvation. The list of reasons to fear God could have no end. What has God done? He’s done everything.

But, the words are really “fear” and “tremble.” The word for “tremble” is the same word that it uses in the Septuagint, the Greek translation. In the book of Job, the word is used when it pictures a guy who looks down at his chest and sees a dagger sticking out of it. It says, “And he trembled.” That’s fear. That’s real trembling. That is the stance we should have before God, in the sense that we are working out our salvation with fear and trembling. Now, here’s the grace. If that’s all it said, “Do work and be scared,” that would be terrible. But here’s the grace for all of us. It’s huge—because “God is working in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

A lot of people get nervous when they see work coupled with salvation, but just to set it straight, the idea of works-based salvation (e.g. like if we do more good than we do bad we go to Heaven) is false, and man-centered, and it is not biblical at all. But we do have some responsibility here. We have a responsibility to follow after God, or we wouldn’t be accountable for our own actions, right? We have a responsibility to seek after the Lord. But, the only reason we can work for God is that God is working in us.

This is difficult to explain, but let me give it my best shot. I used this illustration with the Old Schoolers[[76]](#footnote-76) this week. Let’s say that me and Andrew Gray built this building. That’d be pretty good. Then, if someone were to come up and say, “Hey, who built the Coop?” I’d say, “Oh, that was me and Andrew.” Then they said, “No, specifically, who built what?” Well, then, you could go and write a list of what Spencer did and Andrew did. You could say, “Spencer did the foundation and Andrew did the sub-flooring. Spencer did the framing and Andrew did the sheetrock. Spencer did the HVAC and Andrew did the electrical.” You could get down to the nitty-gritty of, “Well, who did this screw?” “Spencer did that one.” And, “Who did this piece?” “Oh, Andrew did that one.” You could get down and say that Spencer was responsible for these things and Andrew was responsible for these things. But, with salvation, it’s not as cleanly separated as two men working, right? We know that God is working in and through our choices. He’s changing our desires and changing our wants, so you can’t separate it out so cleanly. But, we know this—had God not acted in our minds we would still be His enemies. If God had not acted on us we would still love the darkness. We would still think that the things of God are foolishness. We would have never sought Him out. But, God is working in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Under God’s power and choosing, we obey the initial call to salvation, and now we are to work out our own salvation with an appropriate view of God, which is fear and trembling, knowing that it is God who is doing the work in us. As we work, it is because God has worked and is continuing to work. That’s grace. God does the work of salvation; even empowering our obedience—and we are still responsible to work.

Is that confusing enough for you? Let me give you my paraphrase of this verse, “Work out your salvation because God is working in you, both to want to do, and to do, what He wants you to do.” You work as God works, because really it’s God who is working, but you need to work. Confusing? Both things are present there. God is working in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure. My paraphrase is, “God is working inside of you to make you want to do, and do, whatever pleases Him.” That is God’s grace. God, on His throne, with all power, is getting down in the nitty-gritty and helping you change your desires. He’s helping you change the fact that you’d like to get drunk every night. He’s helping you change the fact that you’d like to look at porn. He’s changing your wants. God is at work in you both to will and to work—to want to do and to do. The first one is “to will”—here’s the hope for Christians—if you are in Christ, God is changing your wants, and we need that. We need it because our wants are man-centered. They’re terrible, right? Here is grace—God is rewriting your desires. God, on His throne, is changing what you want. Your mind is being renewed but this isn’t a passive activity. We are responsible to get to work. We’re responsible to read our Bibles. We’re responsible to pursue the Lord. Right? But God is changing our wants and we need this.

I’m going to read this quickly. There is a guy named Thomas Chalmers and he wrote an essay called *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*.[[77]](#footnote-77) I’m not going to read it because the title alone is meaty enough. I am going to read a little bit of it but I’m not going to read the really hard parts because I can’t understand it all. In *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection* he basically says this. If you don’t want somebody to do something, you can say, “No! Don’t do it!” and they’ll be like, “I’m going to do it.” I’ll read the quote, but he’s saying that we need a stronger desire to push out our own wants. He says this. These two quotes are nerdy so hang onto them and I’m going to try to explain them.

“There are two ways in which a practical moralist may attempt to displace from the human

heart its love of the world - either by a demonstration of the world's vanity, so as that the

heart shall be prevailed upon simply to withdraw its regards from an object that is not

worthy of it; or, by setting forth another object, even God, as more worthy of its attachment.”

Do you get what he’s saying? We can either try to make ourselves stop by saying, “No, I don’t want to look at that porn!” or “No, I don’t want to drink that!” or “No, I don’t want to do that!”—we can either say, “No, don’t do it!” or by grace, God takes that desire and replaces it with a stronger desire that pushes that old desire out. That’s the “expulsive”—it’s the desire that pushes out the other desire. *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*—this is God’s grace. God on His throne is pushing out the sinful desires that we have and is replacing them with a stronger desire for His glory. That’s big. That’s God’s grace.

Now, do we sit on our couch passively and that happens? No, we have to read the Bible. We’ve got to get to work. We have to work out the salvation that’s in us with fear and trembling, because God is working in us to will—to want to do—and then to do, according to His good pleasure. He’s pushing out those desires with stronger desires for Him. They have to be replaced.

Once our minds and our wills are being renewed then our works will follow. We act on what we believe. In the end, we do what we truly want to do, but, by God’s grace, our wants change. Then we do what we really want to do, which is glorify the Lord. And we need to pray for this and we need to work for this. Work hard for this. But we know that it’s not up to us. God in His grace, God on His throne, is rewriting us. If you are in Christ, He has taken your badness and given you His goodness, and now He’s causing you to think differently, little by little. And one of the main ways He causes us to think differently is right here, in this Bible. I’m so convicted that I’m taking the work of sanctification too lightly. I’m so convicted that I’m taking the battle with sin too lightly; that I’m regarding sin too lightly. Paul says, “Therefore, in light of all these things, in light of Christ, obey.” Then, he says,

“For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work according to His good pleasure.”

God’s changing you makes Him happy. That’s a crazy verse to read. It pleases Him. Just like those of you who have kids—your kids please you. God is working in you to make you will and work what pleases Him. We are pleasing to God. No longer are we under condemnation.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”[[78]](#footnote-78)

We are pleasing to God. And He is working our desires so that we please Him more and more. Because the Bible tells us that God is in control of all things and whatever He pleases, He does. He is in the heavens and He does all that He pleases[[79]](#footnote-79), and what pleases God is to make you look more like Him. Man, what grace. He could have just left us alone and said, “Bow your knee.” But, instead of just leaving us alone to bow our knee on our own, He’s given us the grace that we can confess with our mouth now—not only on the last day—we can confess now that Jesus is Lord, and graciously, He starts to do the work inside of us and change us from within, and to make us into something that pleases Him. That’s God’s grace. How does He do that? Through the cross and through the resurrection. And we are going to think about that as we go and take the Lord’s Supper. Let me pray for us and Rob is going to come up and explain it.

Jesus, I thank you that you are at work in me. I need it. I need to be more like you. I need my wants to be more in line with your wants. God, I pray that you would work that out and that you would form me as you want for your good pleasure. And I pray for my part, that I wouldn’t be lazy. I pray that for all of us in this church, God, that we wouldn’t be lazy, but that we would seek you, knowing that our right standing before you doesn’t have anything to do with how much we read the Bible, but that we have been given your righteousness, and now we need to obey. In light of you on the throne, and in light of you on the cross, God, I pray that we would obey and that you would change us into something that pleases you more, and more, and more. Jesus, we love you, and I pray that you would guide us now as we remember your death. I pray that you would guide us, and guide our hearts, as we prepare our hearts to receive your Word and receive the Lord’s Supper. I pray that you would just continue to work in our church and we thank you for your Word. Amen.

(Rob Conti)

As a church, as a family, we get to obey together. Together, we are going to obey the Lord by having this supper, this communion, together; having this meal, as small as it is, to remember—to remember the broken body of Jesus. To remember the blood that was poured out. Do you remember that night? Jesus brought His disciples into the room. He has washed their feet and He has told them and prepared them, and He takes the bread and He breaks it. He says, “This is my body. It’s broken for you. My death is for your life.” And He takes the cup and He fills it with juice and drinks it, and He says, “This is my blood of the New Covenant.” Not the blood of lambs and goats that could never take away sin, but His blood; the blood of the One and only, the Son of God. His blood was shed that can atone, can cleanse, and can remove the wrath of God from us forever. So, tonight we remember that.

I’ll read this from 1 Corinthians 11--Paul’s instruction to the Church. Verses 17-32,

“But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, 19 for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.”

That’s a heavy passage. A lot of times we just do this and we don’t read this passage and explain it every time, but to hit the brakes here, the Lord is telling us to not do this in an unworthy manner. Don’t rush this or go into it thinking it’s just a religious activity. We need to pause and remember why we have the bread, why we have the drink, and to examine ourselves. Because, for us, no one here right now is guilty of eating and drinking before other people and having their fill and the poor among us going without. That is not our issue right now. But, maybe, slander is. Maybe it’s pride in your heart. Maybe it’s gossip. Maybe it’s things you’ve done with your eyes or said with your mouth. Or hurtful things you said to your spouse or your attitude toward your kids. I don’t know. But, the Lord is telling us to hit the brakes and examine ourselves. Because if you do that, and you examine yourself, and you confess these things in light of the humility and the work of Christ in His life, death, and resurrection; if you will confess these things then we can celebrate His forgiveness. We celebrate His atonement. We celebrate that there is no damnation and there is no Hell for us in Christ. We’ve been made free and we’ve been made one in Christ. So, I want to encourage you tonight to take time and examine your heart. Confess your sin before the Lord. Confess and ask for the forgiveness of a brother or sister in Christ. It might be your wife, your husband, or your children. Ask for their forgiveness and move forward with a clear conscience, knowing not that you made it right but that Jesus made it right, and before Him you are celebrating His forgiveness and His grace.

So, what is going to happen is that I’m going to pray in just a minute. Then, the guys are going to come up while I’m praying and we will start playing some music. We are going to give you that time for reflection. And let me say this, if you are not a member of Red Oak but you are a member of the Body of Christ, we welcome you. Please join us in this celebration and join us in this supper. And I will say that if you are not a believer, then please see in the bread and see in the juice the sacrifice of your God to come and rescue you. More important than you eating this right now, is you meditating on who God is and what He has done to save you from your sin. I would beg you, I would plead with you, please repent and trust in Christ, confess your need before God of salvation, and cry out to Him—then partake with us. Then celebrate with us His life, and His death, and His resurrection. So, I’ll pray for us.

Lord Jesus, God, I thank you for this time that we could come under the power of your Word by your Spirit. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that your Spirit met with us tonight, you spoke through your servant, and you spoke to our hearts and minds. I pray that you would find us obedient and that we would walk right now in simple obedience. I pray that we would confess our sin and celebrate your forgiveness, and your grace, and your mercy. I pray that you would be pleased with how we do this right now, as we remember what you have done for us and we look forward to your return. Lord Jesus, we love you and we need you.

“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

Lord Jesus, as we take this, and before we sing to you again, we stop to thank you. Lord Jesus, thank you. We thank you for humbling yourself, for leaving your throne, for seeing us in our need and coming to rescue us. We thank you that you would lay down your life and take it back up. God, I confess my weakness, my selfishness, and Lord I pray that you would forgive me, forgive us, for the time that we waste, and I pray that you would sanctify us tonight through your Word and by your Spirit. That we would go out of here and live our lives in light of your exaltation, and live our lives in light of your soon return, and live our lives by obedience and by the power of you working in and through us. Lord, we confess that we need you. I pray, Father, that we would see more and more people come to faith and repentance in our own town, in our own county, and in the surrounding areas, and that you would bring people to repentance and faith and that they would join us in worship. I pray that you would save them and finish this work in them and lead them to repentance and faith, and make them bold in the Gospel for your glory. I pray now that you would receive our worship and that it would be pleasing before you. I pray this in Christ’s name.

September 18, 2016

Philippians 2:9-13

Brody Holloway

Welcome to Red Oak, if you are visiting. I saw the Mustins here and that’s exciting. They’re like family, though, so they don’t count as visitors. But, if you are visiting, it’s good to have you and we’re going to study the Bible together. Sound good? Turn to Philippians 2.

Today, I was cleaning up my little coffee station area. I’m not a coffee snob—I have a coffee pot and some Folgers—so when I say I’m cleaning up my coffee station it’s pretty simple. But there were coffee grounds, and stains, and it was kind of looking sloppy, so I got to feeling really domestic and thought I’d wipe all of that down, which is not normal for most of us men. So, I didn’t have any paper towels but there was this sponge sitting there on the sink. I picked it up and it was so dry that it couldn’t absorb the moisture that was on the counter where I had sprayed some cleaner. So, I had to soak the sponge in order to get it to absorb so I could squeeze the water out and then go and wipe that moisture up. And the Lord just spoke this word picture to me. I know that for me, a lot of Sundays when I get to church I’m like that sponge. I am so dry, and if I am going to go and impact people, and speak the Gospel to people, and make a difference in people’s lives, I need God’s Word to fill me up, and God’s people to nourish my soul. I hope that you read the Bible daily. We are trying to cultivate a church of theologians—people who are students of the Word and people who are discipled well, and love God’s Word, and read it. I hope you don’t just show up on Sundays and get what you can out of a Sunday message. I hope you are in the Word every day, but isn’t it true that when you live in the world that you get dry? Even that daily cup of coffee and opening the Word of God in the morning to get your day started—I know a lot of us try to start our day with the Word and end our day with the Word, but with just life and the world we live in, Sundays are like survival for me. To come here, and be with y’all, and worship with God’s people; when you have a hundred fifty people singing with a like mind and worshipping the Lord, it’s good. It’s food for my soul. Church is not an exercise or an activity to me. It’s just not. It used to be. But, it’s good to open God’s Word, so we are going to open God’s Word, and pray, and ask God to nourish our souls, and to fill us up. A lot of us are dry right now like that sponge. We need to absorb so that we can go and kind of be wrung out this week and impact other people. I pray that God does that.

So, Philippians 2. Let’s dive into our text. Now, we are going to start in verse 14, but I want to go back and catch the two verses that wrapped up last week’s text, which are 12 and 13. Those verses say,

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed…”

There’s the word “obeyed.” When you see the word “obeyed” in Scripture it is always really important and really helpful. As Christians, when we open God’s Word there are a couple of things we want to do. You will see this in the way that we preach and teach at Red Oak. At Red Oak, we preach and teach expositorily or expositionally. We will soon be doing another round of membership classes and that’s one of the things that we will cover. What that means is that we take a passage of Scripture, and we study it, and we look at what it says, and what it is that the author, or the Holy Spirit, is saying through the writer of the text. But then, we need to draw a line to how that practically plays out in my life. How do I respond to that? What’s the application of that text? A lot of times with Scripture, we have to wrestle with how we respond to the text. There are some texts that are maybe more doctrinal or weighty, so one of the things I have to do is ask how I am to respond to this text. What do I obey in this text? And the other thing we always want to do with the text is ask how does this work in conjunction with the Gospel or how does this connect to the Gospel of Jesus?

One of the things that most of you know by now is that we are always going to talk about the Gospel in every sermon at Red Oak, but we are also going to disciple believers. So, it’s not just an evangelistic proclamation of the Gospel. The Gospel that saved you, if you are a Christian, is the Gospel that empowers you to obey, and it’s the Gospel that helps you understand the Word of God, and it’s the Gospel that, in 1 Corinthians 15:1, says it like this,

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received…”

That’s past tense. That’s when you got saved.

“…in which you stand…”

That’s present tense. The Gospel is applicable every moment of our life. The Gospel is always practical and applicable in the present tense.

“…and in which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the Word.”

So, one of the phrases that we see in tonight’s text is this idea of holding fast or holding forth the Word of life. Paul tells the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 15, hold firmly or hold fast to the Word of faith, and this is an ongoing theme in the Christian’s life. If you want to want to live effectively and if I want to live effectively in my life this week; if I’m going to minister to people at work, and I’m going to minister to people in the community, and if you want to not just minister to people but also stand firm in your own faith and not be carried away by worldly philosophies or bad doctrine, then I hold fast to the Gospel with one hand and I white-knuckle grip the Word of Truth with the Gospel. The Gospel and the Word of God are the two things I’m holding onto. So, I have to do that.

In Philippians 2:12, we see that word “obeyed” in the past tense. Then, he says,

“So now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

So, we are called to obey, and in obeying the Word of God we are to work out our salvation. So, last week we looked at this idea of working out our salvation with fear and trembling, and what that looks like practically. Now, what’s going to happen is that in tonight’s text we are going to go into a further practical application of how we work out our salvation. This is one of those texts where we go, “Okay, you’re telling me what to do. I can work with that.” For a lot of us, it’s like we show up at church and say, “Just tell me what to do. Tell me how to react. Tell me how to respond. I need information but I need for you to tell me how it practically applies to my life.”

So, Paul writes in verse 14,

“Do all things…”

“All things” is inclusive. I think of Romans 8:28, that says that for the believer, for those of us who love God, all things in our lives work together for God’s good and God’s glory, if we love Him. Now, this is critical—all things do not work together for a person’s good if they are not a believer. So, Romans 8:28 says that all things work together for God’s glory and our good, in our lives, and the things that we encounter day to day are going to have a good end in one way or another, because as believers we are focused on an eternal reality. So, in our lives, all things are working toward that end. So, even something catastrophic like cancer, or the death of a child—in the end that is working towards glory. So, Romans 8:18 says this,

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

So, there is this future glory that we are waiting for that Paul also talks to the Corinthians about. There’s this future glory. So, all things in my life happen, are played out, and I live my life in light of this future glory. Nothing is just for the here and now.

Now, if we don’t love God, we are not Christians; we are in this world, and of this world, and this is the main thing—get what you can now because this is all there. Then we don’t have the promise that all things are going to work out for good. For instance, if what we are living for is secular hedonism, which is “if it feels good, do it” because all you have is this body and these experiences, that can backfire on you and then you are left with nothing but pain and destructive results.

So, for the Christian, all things in my life are working toward God’s ultimate good for me. But, for an unbeliever, they don’t have that promise. If you’re not a Christian there is a level and a degree of hopelessness in your life that the Gospel is the only answer for. Jesus is the only answer for it. When you are not a believer, you don’t have a context to put death, and dying, and suffering, and financial catastrophe, and global famine, or world war into. Whether it’s global or personal, you have no category to put evil, sickness, and bad things into. Because all things are not working out for good—they’re just working for bad. But then you don’t even have a context for what’s bad and what’s good because you have nothing to measure it against.

But, for the believer, when we see the phrase “all things,” it gives us hope that in “all things” Christ is preeminent. In all things Jesus is sovereign. In all things Christ sits on the throne. In all things He is working for His good and His glory. In all things He is working for my good. In all things there is purpose in what’s happening. And some of you, this week, need to grab a hold of that because you are in a difficult season.

So, now, in verse 14, he says,

“Do all things…,”

So he brings our action into this. In every part of your life “do all things.” High school students, go to school. Middle school students, go to school. Do class, do homework. If you are in college, study for your tests and write your papers. If you work in manufacturing, or you run a business—whatever you are doing in your life this week, everything I’m doing in my life this week, needs to be done in this manner…

“…without grumbling or disputing.”

That word “disputing” means “without argumentation.” Because here’s the reality when you connect those two words; people who tend to grumble and complain also tend to argue with others a lot. Grumbling leads to argumentation. A person who complains and grumbles a lot is not going to typically turn around and get along with everybody and be a joyful person. Those two kind of run together, and grumbling typically is revealing a lack of satisfaction with who God is and with what God has given me. That’s typically going to flesh itself out in the way that I treat others, because it’s going to be revealed as coveteousness, and speculation, and I’m not going to do what Paul tells me to do in the first three verses of this chapter, which is to prefer others better than myself, and give people the benefit of the doubt. So, if you’re a grumbler and a complainer, that tends to affect your other relationships, particularly your inner circle relationships, like your marriage. Or, if you’re a teenager, your relationship to your parents or your siblings. If you are a mom or a dad, your relationship to your kids. It tends to affect those closest relationships. At work, maybe it’s that inner circle or people you work with. So, grumbling tends to lead to argumentation, so Paul addresses them both.

Now, Paul addresses this in light of calling us to obedience. So, he tells us “work out your salvation in fear and trembling” and “obey without grumbling.” This is kind of a big deal, because a lot of times I think we would have a tendency to obey God’s Word but do so just because we have to. I shared this illustration with my kids this week. This is probably one of the oldest and most used preacher illustrations ever, but it’s really practical. It’s the story of the little boy who wants to stand up in church and his mom tells him to sit down. He stands up and his mom says, “Sit down. We’re in church. You need to sit down.” So, he sits down and in a few minutes he stands up again, and mom says, “You need to sit down.” A few minutes later he stands up and she says, “Sit down. I mean it. This is the last time I’m telling you.” So, he sits, and after about twenty minutes she looks at him and says, “It’s so good that you’re obeying me,” and he says, “Yeah, but I’m standing up on the inside.” It’s like, I’m doing this but I’m doing this purely out of obligation.

Now, Paul says in Romans 8 that we are debtors but we are not debtors to the flesh. We don’t owe our flesh anything, so when our flesh grumbles, and our flesh complains, and our flesh desires something that is not ours to have, Scripture would say that you don’t owe your flesh anything. Grumbling reveals that I am yielding to my flesh, but I’m not a debtor to my flesh, I’m a debtor to the Gospel. I’m a debtor to others. Paul says, “I’m under obligation both to Jews and Greeks…to slaves, free, barbarians.” I’m under obligation to people. Romans 1:14 says I’m under obligation to proclaim the Gospel and love people well. I can’t pay God back but I’m under obligation to those who don’t know the Gospel. But, when I grumble against the Lord it’s going to impact and affect my relationships with other people. So, Paul tells us not to grumble.

1 Corinthians 10:31 says, instead, that whatever I eat or drink, or whatever I do, I’m to do it all to God’s glory. In my life, day to day, the menial tasks, the big tasks, the huge projects, and the little things, I’m to do those things to God’s glory so that I might reflect the Gospel well. When you go to school this week, when you go to work this week, you have this golden opportunity to reflect the reality of the Gospel in the way that you interact with people and in the way you find satisfaction and joy in every aspect of your life. So, living in contentment and living in satisfaction is going to reflect the Gospel well and glorify Christ.

I need to understand that discipleship is not easy. Following Christ is hard and so I have to work out my salvation. Sweat and tears, blood and guts, trial and tribulation, temptation and hardship—all of these are things that we are going to face, and the temptation will be to complain, and to argue, or to be angry with someone and let them know it. Have you ever been around somebody who just complains all the time? There is this one guy. I hope somebody doesn’t say I’m that guy. But, there is this one guy where I almost want to go the other way, because I know that when I say, “What’s up?” or “How’s it going?” – I’ve actually changed the way I greet him—I don’t say, “What’s up?” or “How’s it going?” But, I’ll say something like, “Jesus is on the throne, man” – I just walk up and start encouraging the dude. Because if you ask him how he’s doing, he’s going to tell you, and it’s going to take a long time. He’s not happy. He’s angry with the local coaches. He’s angry with his boss. He doesn’t like his wife. He hates the US government. His pastor is sorry and his church is terrible. He’s going to go down the same checklist every time and I’ve gotten to where I’m like, “Dude, you’ve got to stop. I can’t handle this. Is anything good in your life right now? Let’s talk about it.” I don’t want to be that way. This guy is a good friend of mine, so I have that relationship with him where I can say, “Man, you complain a lot.”

But, I know that the natural tendency of a human is to complain and grumble, and that comes from the fact that we are coming out of a situation, before we meet Jesus, where we are slaves to the flesh, and as slaves of the flesh we are constantly yielding to the demands of the flesh. What Christ does is He fills us and gives us something greater than what the flesh can demand. So, I don’t need to be a grumbler or a complainer, but rather someone who recognizes God’s goodness in my life. In 1 Peter 4:9, it says that we are to show hospitality to one another without grumbling. True obedience is joyful and positive and it will impact others. True faithfulness and obedience is never merely outward action and compliance. The teaching is that Christians should be likeminded and able to get along. We serve one another and give preference and the benefit of the doubt to one another. Church problems arise when people choose to be negative and not positive. We are supposed to speak and act in a manner worthy of the Gospel. Listen to Philippians 1:27, which we studied a couple of weeks ago,

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”

So, when Paul speaks of living a manner of life that’s worthy of the Gospel, we remember that we talked about this a couple of weeks ago. Philippi was a Roman colony, so to become a Roman citizen was really difficult. Some of you knew a guy that used to work at Monte Alban here in town, whose name was Paco. Y’all remember that guy? He was an awesome dude. He came to town from another country, learned the language, and then became friends with everybody. He just had one of those personalities. There are two things that stand out in my mind about him. He has moved and started a restaurant in another state, but there are two things. One, is that he married a local girl and I remember when they were having their second kid, Paco said to me, “Kids are really expensive.” I said something like, “Yeah, man, you have to feed them like every other day or something. It’s crazy. Sometimes they eat twice in one day.” For you visitors, I’m kidding. I feed my kids a lot. But I remember him saying, “Yeah, but I made them so I’m going to pay for them.” He said it joyfully, like, “Yeah, they’re my kids so I want to feed them.” It stood out to me because I don’t know that Paco was a believer. He told me that he wouldn’t consider himself a Christian, but he was just a cool dude. The other thing that I remember was that he wanted to get his citizenship and he went through this process that involved him having to leave and go back to Mexico for a year. Some of you might remember that. He did it; he left his wife and kids and went back, and he went through all of the hoops that he had to go through, and the red tape, and spent money. And I remember when the day came for him to be sworn in as an American citizen, and he had to take this history test, I was like, “Dude, good luck on the history test because there’s a lot that’s happened in the last couple hundred years. I hope they ask you the right questions.” I was kidding with him, but I remember when he was going to do that, I thought, “When that man becomes a citizen, he is going to proudly wear that citizenship.” I was just born into this deal. I’m mean, I’m proud to be an American, where at least I know I’m free, and I won’t forget the men who died to give that right to me. I’m real proud of it. I’m proud to know guys like Sam who served in the military, and I’m thankful for that, and we have veterans who come into this church and are part of this church. I’m thankful for that. I’m a patriot—but I didn’t pay for my citizenship. I got a birth certificate that says I was born.

Jenn Forchetti laughs at me all the time. We have this running joke where birthdays are kind of funny to me. We celebrate someone’s birth, and I get it, but you didn’t really do anything worth getting a pat on the back. The natural order of things just put you on planet Earth. God’s in His sovereignty, you are born, and here you are, and we are simply the recipients of God’s grace. The fact that we are alive is awesome. The fact that we are citizens of this country and our citizenship is here—we didn’t really earn it. But a guy like Paco earned it. And if you were living in Philippi and you were a Roman citizen, you had worked for that. It was hard to do. You earned that. So, when Paul says in Philippians 1:27 to live a manner of life worthy of the Gospel, that was something that was common—live a manner of life that’s worthy of your Roman citizenship. The idea was to dress like a Roman and behave like a Roman. People came there from all over the world and were becoming Romans. What they wanted to do was be educated like Romans, dress like Romans, trade like Romans, and be seen as Romans. That was the thing to do. So, Paul is saying, as a Christian live a manner of life that says, “I’m so grateful that I’m in Christ. I’m so glad God saved me.”

Y’all, I was going to Hell. There was a point in my life when I was going to Hell. I was nineteen years old and I did not know Jesus. I did not know Jesus and if I died I was going to Hell. If Christ didn’t intervene, and the power of the Gospel didn’t save me, and I was not snatched out of the dominion of darkness and brought into the domain of God’s beloved Son, and I was not brought from a kingdom of darkness into a kingdom of light, and if the Gospel didn’t intersect my path, and God didn’t redeem me, ransom me, and save me, I was going to Hell. That’s what was going to happen to me. And that’s what was going to happen to every single one of you. But, because of the power of the Gospel, the grace of God, the providential, sovereign authority of God to stomp sin and Satan, to conquer death and the grave, and to hold forth the Gospel, and from that Gospel to save sinners—because of that, I should never have a moment’s worth of complaining in me—because I’m bound for glory. Heaven is my eternal promise. Everything in this life is a momentary shadow of a permanent reality that will one day exist. I have an inheritance that awaits me.

Listen to the description of Heaven in Isaiah 65. The topic of Heaven and what eternity is going to be like is something that we are all curious about and there is not a lot said about it in Scripture. We all picture the whole streets of gold thing and wonder what that looks like. Is it kind of the Wizard of Oz display at Tweetsie Railroad? Have you been to Tweetsie Railroad? It’s like Six Flags has a little brother that’s a convict. It’s a lot of fun and we went there a lot when I was growing up. They have this Wizard of Oz exhibit. The Wizard of Oz is a horror movie, kids—just so you know. There are flying monkeys and little scary people. So, Heaven is not like Oz, but I remember watching the scene with the yellow brick road and I can remember, as a kid—true story—thinking, “Is that what streets of gold are like?” But, what Scripture gives us is such a lofty image and vision of what Heaven is going to be like that we can’t comprehend it. In fact, Paul tells the Colossians that your eye has not seen, and your ear has not heard, and your mind cannot comprehend or conceive what awaits you.

Isaiah 65 does a really good job of explaining Heaven. Verse 17,

“For behold, I create new heavens

and a new earth,

and the former things shall not be remembered

or come into mind.

18 But be glad and rejoice forever

in that which I create;

for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy,

and her people to be a gladness.

19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem

and be glad in my people;

no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping

and the cry of distress.

20 No more shall there be in it

an infant who lives but a few days,

or an old man who does not fill out his days,

for the young man shall die a hundred years old,

and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

21 They shall build houses and inhabit them;

they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.”

We are going to build houses and inhabit them. We are going to plant vineyards and eat the fruit.

“They shall not build and another inhabit;

they shall not plant and another eat;

for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,

and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

23 They shall not labor in vain

or bear children for calamity,

for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord,

and their descendants with them.

24 Before they call I will answer;

while they are yet speaking I will hear.

25 The wolf and the lamb shall graze together;

the lion shall eat straw like the ox,

and dust shall be the serpent's food.

They shall not hurt or destroy

in all my holy mountain,”

says Yahweh.”

It’s a beautiful picture of what Heaven’s going to be like. Whatever you are dealing with in this life is not bad enough for you to complain. Whatever I am facing this week—I don’t get a day off by saying, “Man, I’ve working hard and been positive for weeks, so I’m just going to gripe and complain today.” Because Scripture says in the Old Testament, in Exodus 6, that the Israelites would grumble and complain, and throughout the book of Deuteronomy there were times where they were complaining against God. God brought them out of bondage and slavery and at one point they were longing for Egypt, the place that was the source of their slavery. When the pastors were meeting today, Spencer pointed out that what was happening was that they were living day to day. You might remember that God was feeding them manna from Heaven, and providing quail, and they were getting food every day, but it was a day to day existence. So, they were thinking, “At least, when I lived in Egypt I knew that at five o’clock each day that they were going to feed me.” There was no real act of faith while living in that slavery. When you look back to your life before Jesus, there was not a lot of faith involved in that. You just lived for the day and that was it. As Christians, we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.[[80]](#footnote-80) But we live by faith and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, because the future that we have is the future glory that Christ has promised us, and that puts everything in the right context for us.

So, practically, kids, learn to say thank you. Adults, moms, and dads, don’t complain in front of your kids. If you don’t have enough money, don’t complain about that. Convince your kids you’re really rich. It’ll be fine—because if you’re eating three times a day you actually are, if you look at the global context. Don’t argue with each other. Don’t be ugly to each other. Dad, don’t speak ugly to mom in front of your kids. Don’t do that. Don’t speak ugly to her, ever. You should never speak ugly to your wife. And when there are issues and conflicts that need to be resolved, there’s a biblical way of dealing with it.

When Paul says, “Don’t grumble and argue,” he’s not saying, “Don’t resolve conflict.” People tend to do one of three things when it comes to conflict. They either ignore it so then it just festers inside. Or they address it wrongly, by maybe an explosion of anger, or argumentation, or yelling at each other, or being accusatory. Or, we handle it biblically, which for a mom and a dad is to go behind closed doors and work the thing out. Prefer the other person and recognize that your main goal in that person’s life is her holiness and her Christlikeness. That’s what I need to be concerned about. So, there’s a right way to deal with conflict. Instead of grumbling, what I should do—and he’s addressing this in the end of our text for tonight—is that I should rejoice and be glad. I’ve been saved. I rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. I’ve been saved and that’s the context I live my life in. The Gospel of Jesus Christ will shut up my grumbling, daily. The Gospel will stop your grumbling. Remember the Gospel that saved you, and walk, and dwell, and live in that Gospel. You won’t complain, you won’t grumble, and you won’t be a whiner.

There is one thing that I won’t allow in my home and that’s whining. I have a three year old and he does that thing—“Whaa-whaa-whaa…”—and I say, “No, man. That’s against the rules. That’s an infraction. That’s a federal offense in this nation. That’s imprisonment. You can’t whine.” If you get hurt you can squall, or holler, or if it’s bad enough to scream good we will roll with that, but no whining allowed under any circumstances. And I feel like that, as Christians, a lot of times we are just whiny. But the Gospel will stop that. A constant awareness of the Gospel will stop that.

John Newton gives an illustration that I’m going to put into a modern context because he lived a few hundred years ago. But, in a modern context, imagine someone has received this inheritance. His rich uncle died and he received this inheritance and all he has to do is go claim it. So, he is going to go to this place to claim his inheritance—this massive estate, with houses, and outbuildings, barns, livestock, the best toys, boats, and Seadoos, and jetskis, and four-wheelers, and nice trucks, on the best hunting property ever. It’s loaded with Boone and Crockett size whitetail deer[[81]](#footnote-81), with a massive lake that’s brimming with fish. This guy has landed the jackpot. He also has enough money to fund the next ten generations. He’s got millions sitting in the bank. But, this dude is driving in his old car and he gets about a mile from the property where he’s going to sign himself into his inheritance and the car breaks down. If you passed that guy walking on the road toward that property, and he’s griping and complaining about his old car, you would think that’s really strange. What you would expect is to see him running along, skipping, and hopping, and singing, because he’s getting ready to go claim his inheritance. Christians who grumble and complain are like that. We are complaining about something in the shortsightedness of life when what awaits us is the future glory that will never, ever, ever end. So, we don’t want to complain. We want to put on Christ. I think that a lot of times we want to put on Christ, put on Jesus, but we don’t want to do the hard work of discipleship.

Years ago, I got into mountain biking and I made a solemn vow to never wear those skinny Spandex pants. I know that a lot of you appreciate that. You would never be the same if you saw your pastor riding around in those little, skinny Spandex pants. Now, if you’re a biker and you wear those things, that’s fine. But, you know what, I ride a bike and I love to shred it on some single track, but I’m going to wear gym shorts to do that. I’m not willing to put that uniform on. But, you know what’s funnier than anything? I had a buddy who decided he was going to get into biking and the first thing he bought was a pair of those stretchy pants. This is a true story. He called me up and said, “Hey, man, are we going to go ride?” And I said, “Yeah, let’s go ride.” So, we were going to go meet up at Tsali, which are some trails not far from here. I rolled up, parked my truck, and got my bike out. I was wearing those pants, but I was wearing gym shorts over them. This is a true story—He rolls up, steps out of his truck, and was wearing those Spandex pants with the word “Trek” down the side of them, because that was the kind of bike he bought. The matching shirt was like a Tour de France jersey. He had pockets with water bottles in them, and he had the helmet, and the shirt, and the pants, and he had a heart monitor. I was like, “Hey, man, is this your first ride on this bike?” and he said, “Yeah, man, I’m stoked!” He was going to put it on and wear it. But what was crazy was that literally about a month later he sold the bike. He said, “This ain’t for me.”

I feel like a lot of Christians want to put on Christ, because initially they think, “I can do this. I want to go to Heaven. I’ll get saved.” Or maybe they’re promised some prosperity Gospel, and it’s exciting, or they see something that appeals to them, and they are drawn in, but when it comes to really, really, really living it out they just bail. It’s not enough to just put on Christianity as a religious belief system. When we put on Christ, we are embracing the humility of Christ and we are going to live like it. The way that we wear Jesus and the way that we put on Jesus is going to make a statement to the world about what we think about Him, and that’s what Paul is addressing in the next part of the passage. He says,

“That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”

Grumbling, complaining, and arguing cause us to lose our saltiness. In Matthew 5, Jesus says that we are the light of the world and we are the salt of the earth, but we can lose our saltiness and our lights can grow dim. The world is dark and it needs our lights to be bright. The world is bitter and it needs our saltiness to bring flavor. But, when we grumble and complain we dim our light and we lose our saltiness.

1 Corinthians 15:58 says we should be immovable, and stand fast, and always abound in the work of the Lord, and know that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Because our labor for joy, our work for joy, our work to be satisfied in Christ, is going to display Jesus to the world. How hard I work for joy, how hard I work for my marriage, how hard I work to be honest, and how hard I work to love people well, is going to display Christ to the world. And in the end, Paul says, in verse 16,

“So that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.”

Paul is talking about the return of Christ. 1 Thessalonians 4 tells us that Christ is going to come back. We see glimpses of this in Revelation 19-21, when Christ is riding on the white horse. Jesus is going to return. Don’t forget, church, Jesus is coming back! He’s coming back. We say that we believe that the return of Christ is imminent. We believe He is going to come back, either in our lifetime or not, but this is not all there is, and I want to work hard in light of standing before Jesus and giving an account for my life. You are going to give an account for your marriage. You are going to give an account for your sonship. You are going to give an account for how you parent. Men, you are going to stand before Jesus and answer for your children. They are going to stand before Him and answer for their own salvation. That isn’t on you. But you will give an account for what you did as a father and as a husband. Does that scare you? It should. It should freak you out. It should motivate and drive you to lead your family well and to serve your family well.

We want to be a church of strong men who love and honor their wives and love and honor the others in this church—the single moms and the kids who don’t have daddies. We want to love you well. We want to be a place that has an eternal perspective when it comes to how we live our lives as men. Because the day of the Lord is going to come and we are going to stand before Him and I don’t want it to have been that I labored in vain. What does that mean? That I worked for vanity. Solomon writes about this in Ecclesiastes. He goes through all the things that he did and that he achieved in this life and he says it’s all just vanity. It’s like chasing the wind. We are going to give an account.

A friend of mine, Hank Parker, Jr., was preaching this weekend at a men’s conference that we hosted here. He was preaching on Saturday morning and he told a story where he said, “Me and my son were sitting on the back porch and were looking out in the yard, and I said to my son, ‘What if a big ol’ 350 inch elk[[82]](#footnote-82), a big trophy elk, came walking out of the woods?’” Now, he lives in North Carolina and not near the Smokies, so that’s not going to happen. But he said, “What if a big ol’ elk came out and what if you went and got your Gammo pellet gun, and shot him, and killed him dead right there?” His son, Boone, was like, “That would be awesome, dad! I could hang it on the wall and tell people, ‘I killed this elk.’” Then he said, he told his kid, “But, what if we got dropped into the middle of the Arizona wilderness and we spent ten days stalking and tracking and then you killed a trophy elk? How much more rewarding would it be to say, ‘We worked hard for this and we got it’?”

Look, we don’t work for our salvation. We know that. That was more than thoroughly covered last week. But we’ve got work to do. That’s why Paul says, “Labor.” He says, “I want to be proud that I didn’t run in vain or labor in vain.” Y’all, running is hard. Sam Christensen gave me some running shoes. I was like, “I guess you’re supposed to run in these,” so I went running. People do this on purpose. People say, “I’m going to go running,” and they do it. They just go run around. They run. I say, “Where you going?” and they’re like, “I don’t know, I’m just gonna run.” “Why? Why are you doing that?” If they ring the dinner bell I might get in a hurry, you know? But, I get it. You run because it’s good for you. There’s a balance and I think there’s a point where it’s not good for you. Look, I run for mental toughness. Sam, I appreciate those shoes. I don’t wear them around because they’re goofy looking but I want you to know I appreciate them. I will run in them. I run, and wheeze, and sweat, because I’m not a runner. I’m 6’3” and #220—that is not a runner. Nobody in the Olympics on a marathon team looks like that. But, why am I going to run? Because it’s good. It’s hard.

Paul uses running to describe the Christian life. It’s supposed to be hard. When something’s supposed to be hard, and you do it, and it’s hard, don’t complain about it. If I’m running and I’m like, “This is stupid!” do you know what I can do? Stop, and go eat a pizza. But when you run, and the Gospel is the motivating factor—Paul is saying, “I run, and I labor, and I work so that”—watch this—“so that my light would shine before men and they would glorify their Father who is in Heaven.” If we want to live out the Gospel—not just preach it but practice it—we should be joyful, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God and we don’t grumble and complain, but we look at God’s goodness and we say, “Taste and see that the Lord is good,” and we say with the writer of Lamentations, “His mercies are new every morning.” If today was bad, tomorrow when you wake up it may still be bad on this Earth but the Gospel is still what raptures and has you. Life is good for the Christian. The believer who is imprisoned in North Korea rejoices in the hope of the glory of God.

Remember, those of you who have walked through this study, you know this. Those of you who haven’t, we saw in chapter 1, Paul saying, “They might kill me, guys. There’s a good chance they are going to kill me. I don’t know if I’m going to live, but you know what, if my life ends…” Verse 17, “Even if I’m being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrificial offering of your faith, I’m glad. I’m rejoicing with you all.” Then, look at this,

“Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.”

He’s saying, “I’m going to possibly die for the Gospel and I’m glad about what’s happening. And you should rejoice with me. You shouldn’t complain against each other. You shouldn’t grumble because of your circumstances.” Those are powerful words.

I don’t have the credibility to say this to y’all, because I’m a complainer. Paul had the credibility to say this because he is writing from prison, and he’s thinking they’re going to kill him. He says, “I’m not complaining, I’m rejoicing—so be glad, and rejoice, and hold firmly to God’s Word, and hold forth God’s Word.” Colossians 3:16 says,

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

We said earlier, we need to know the Gospel every day, and we need to spend time in God’s Word every day, and when we do that the Word of Christ will dwell in us richly. C. J. Mahaney says this,

“We are to be a proclaiming church, not a complaining church.”

If I remind myself of the Gospel daily, and I plant my feet firmly in the Gospel daily, and I spend time in God’s Word daily, and l love the Lord God with my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and I love others as I love myself, and I prefer people more than I prefer myself, and I do unto others as God would have me to do unto them—what I going to do by my actions is that I’m going to be a proclaimer, not a complainer. So, when I verbally proclaim the Gospel it’s going to be backed up by a life of action.

I want to get this right. So, how do I avoid arguing, and grumbling, and how do I remain joyful? Here’s what it boils down to—in light of verses 6-11, which we have already studied, Paul is telling us how to live our lives. First, we are to live our lives in the shadow of the cross. We are to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. We are to give witness by not grumbling. We are to hold out the Word of life. We are to rejoice through sacrificial service. And we are to anticipate Christ’s return. Now, how can I do this practically? I want to end tonight and land the plane by giving you ten quick practical things, with no real elaboration, that I think we can do in our lives daily. You could come up with ten more tonight, and ten more the next week, and ten more. This is just ten things that I see in my life where I need to work hard at to be intentional.

#1 – Give thanks constantly. Paul was constantly persecuted but he was constantly giving thanks. The Scripture tells us that thanksgiving produces joy. When you are giving thanks, it produces joy in you. Think about eating something that you really enjoy and going, “Thank you, Jesus, that I have tastebuds!” What are you doing? You are thanking God and it makes it that much better and that much sweeter. Thanksgiving produces joy.

I often encourage students to sit down and write and fill a notebook with one sentence lines of things they are thankful for, from the shoes on your feet, to the fact that you have a bed to sleep in, and food to eat two or three times a day. Give thanks.

#2 – Pray for the needs of others. Start realizing that life ain’t about you. When people grumble, it’s because their life is all about them. When I’m grumbling it’s because I’m the center of my world. Life isn’t about you. It’s first and foremost about Jesus and then it’s about others. I fall in line somewhere behind all of that. If I do the first two right—if I give Jesus the appropriate place in my life and then I put others in the right place in my life, I won’t even think about me. That will consume all my time, and emotion, and focus, and energy.

#3 – Give of time and resources for the advance of the work of the Gospel. The Pinwheel tutoring that we do—we are going to talk about it at the end tonight because tomorrow is the big meeting. When I tell people who are not from Andrews, North Carolina, and who are not from Clay, or Graham, or this tri-county area—when I tell people from the outside, because we see a lot of people come through this ministry—that we have a tutoring program where we take a school bus, pick up kids from the elementary school, bring them here, tell them about Jesus, pray with them, teach them how to read, give them food, and send them out with full bellies, and that it’s all for the sake of the Gospel, and it’s a public school, people flip out. God has miraculously laid this opportunity in our laps. For every person who will help us do this on Mondays and Wednesdays, we get another kid from the school. Right now, we are stuck at about 30-35 kids and I know that there are about 65-80 that we could bump that to. Do you know why we can’t do it? Because it’s a one-on-one deal and we can only do it with as many people as we have. And people won’t sign up. Why? I don’t know. Here’s the thing—you should ask yourself, “Why wouldn’t I sign up to do this?” not “Why would I?” Some of you have work and I get it. You have a special needs kid you have to take care of at home. You have an elderly parent that you need to take care of at home. But for some of us, we need to be going, “Why wouldn’t I do this?” It’s on Mondays and Wednesdays. Give of time and resources to others.

How do I avoid arguing, and grumbling, and remain joyful..

#4 – Always respond to people kindly. At the drive-thru at McDonald’s, be nice. Don’t be so demanding. It’s a one dollar cheeseburger that’s really worth about thirty cents. People have such a sense of entitlement. We have such a consumeristic mentality. I talked to Ken Osburn a lot of times, and he and Melissa have a store where they deal with the public and in selling goods to the public, and he says people have this sense of entitlement like, “I’m giving you five bucks for this thing so you owe me the world.” As a Christian, don’t be like that. Make that person’s day more joyful. Always respond to people just kindly. You can smile and be nice, always. And tip well. Tip really good. The worst tip time is Sunday lunch after people have been to church. That’s sad.

#5 – Prefer others. Chapter 2:1-3 – we saw that a couple of weeks ago. Prefer others. Extend preferential treatment to other people. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Believe in what God is doing in people’s lives.

#6 – Boast in Jesus constantly. Look at what Paul says in verse 16, “Holding fast to the Word of Life so that in the day of Christ I may be proud.” He says in Galatians 6:14, “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of Christ Jesus.” Boast in the cross. Brag on Jesus. Boast in the cross, constantly.

#7 – Compliment others. High school girls, listen up. It’s a competitive world you live in. People are ugly to each other. We have teenagers. Be complimentary. Do you want to be completely counter-cultural and blow people’s minds—say nice things to other people that are complimentary. It’ll blow their minds.

#8 – Invest time into someone who can give you nothing in return. An elderly neighbor, a kid that’s in need.

#9 – Surround yourself with extremely godly people who shine light on you and then go into the world and be the light shining into a dark place. Jim Boice talks about how basically the way that the sun refracts and sheds light on the back side of the planet sometimes. I don’t know if you noticed but we’ve had a harvest moon and the last couple of nights have been brilliant. That’s why I haven’t gone hunting the last three days—it’s three in the morning and deer are eating right now. The harvest moon is so amazing. Is the moon that bright? No, the Sun is that bright. That reflection and that refraction of light that comes into the Earth’s atmosphere. That’s why, when you see pictures of the Earth from outer space, the Earth is glowing with light. Christians bring the spiritual side of light to the world like that. Surround yourself with people who are going to do that in your life for you and then go do that in the world. Don’t just hole up with godly people and ignore the world—go into the world and make a difference.

#10 – Read and reread the Gospel. Read passages about eternal things. Stay in the Word and proclaim and preach the Gospel to yourself daily. What will happen is that you will find yourself rejoicing and being glad. He says in verse 17 that even if he is being poured out as a drink offering, which is a reference to a pagan practice of pouring an offering out on an altar—what he is saying is, “Even if I’m dying, even if my life is being spent for the Gospel, I’m going to rejoice and you should rejoice and be glad with me.” Isn’t that sweet? The Scripture says that they will know we are Christians by our love. By this will all men know that Jesus is real, and that the Gospel is real, and that our faith is real—that we love each other, and we love each other well.

Let’s pray.

Lord, your Word is clear—we should do things better; without grumbling and without complaining. We should hold forth the Word of light. We should love your Word, believe your Word, and obey your Word. We should read it, and study it, and live in light of it. Thank you for giving us truth and thank you for saving us. God, if there are people here tonight who don’t have a relationship with you and they don’t have a context to put this in, I pray that you would speak into the darkness of this world and the depravity and the brokenness of their own sin, and shed the light of the Gospel, and awaken and regenerate that which is dead in them, and bring them to saving faith. We love you, and praise you, and thank you for the victory and the freedom that we have, and the salvation that we have because of Calvary and because of the Gospel, and because of the resurrected Lord and the exalted position that you hold. I pray that this week we would be intentional in our rejoicing and in our witness. In Jesus’ name.

(Rob Conti)

By way of announcements, membership classes are starting in October, so sign up sheets are still in the back. They are on Wednesday nights and they will start around six o’clock. We should be able to eat together, have a quick meal, and provide childcare if you need it. There will be four membership classes every Wednesday in October. Even if you don’t know yet if you want to join Red Oak, just coming to the classes doesn’t make you a member. You may decide that you don’t want to join. But, please come to classes. You’ll learn why we put such an emphasis on membership and what it means to be under the care of elders and pastors, and what that would look like from our responsibility and yours. So, sign up is in the back for that. If you have questions, you can contact me. My name is Rob.

Also, we have a couple of baptisms coming up in October. We are still working out which Sunday we are going to do it, but we will do baptisms down in the creek. So, if you are a believer and a follower of Jesus, but you haven’t obeyed by being baptized and by being immersed, and proclaiming through that act the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and how that has rescued you from sin and death—please contact us because we would love to talk to you about that. That would be an awesome time to do it. We are going to be down there at the creek anyway, so you can join us.

I am going to read our benediction from Numbers 6. We’ve had such an awesome night of worship together and for all of us to take that one huge point of holding forth the Gospel—I encourage you as you meditate on the Gospel, and saturate your mind with the truth that we have heard, we have the opportunity this week to hold forth the Gospel to our community. So, the Word of God says this,

“The Lord bless you and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”

Amen. I love you, church.

September 25, 2016

Philippians 2:19-30

Brody Holloway

We should each be living our lives where others would want to emulate what we are doing. If you are a Christian, and this is for every single one of us, people should look at our lives and say, “I want to be like her. I could learn from his example. Oh, I see what he’s doing there; I think that’s attainable.” At the same time, we should all be looking to others to learn from their examples—younger men learning from older men and younger women learning from older women. Ladies and men in your twenties need to be investing in those that are younger than you—younger than you in the faith, anyway. Paul, in his pastoral epistles, will often say things like this. He says to Titus that the young men are to respect the older men and the older women are to teach the younger women. We are supposed to live exemplary lives so that we encourage each other and not discourage each other with lives of hypocrisy. So, if we simply profess to be Christ followers, we are held to the highest level of accountability. If you say that you follow Jesus, then the starting point is out of reach for humanity. Where you are starting your life is with the righteousness of Christ—that’s not what you are working toward.

For those of us who are Christians, if I raise my hand and say, “I’m a Christian. I’m a Christ follower,” my starting point is on a higher plane or a higher level than the most I could ever achieve in this world by my own power. That’s where I’m starting from. Then, sanctification takes me upward toward glory, where one day I will be made like Jesus. Sanctification simply is the process of becoming more like Jesus in your life. So, if you are a Christian, you are in the process of sanctification. If you’ve been a Christian for a week, you’re in the process of sanctification. If you’ve been a Christian for seventy years, you’re in the process of sanctification. You are being made more like Jesus. We start with the righteousness of Christ and we go upward to where one day we are with Jesus and He makes us like Him forever. And one of the healthiest things we can have along the way is godly examples of people who show us how to live our lives.

Dads, you should work to be that example for your sons and daughters. Moms, you should work to be that example for your sons and daughters. Employers, you should work to invest in your employees relationally, so that they see something in you that is worthy of emulation. We should do this. The people we work with day-to-day should see in us something that is worthy of emulation. So, if we are going to reflect Christ well, we need to live lives where people who don’t know the Lord can say, “I’d like to live like she lives. She seems to have joy. She seems to have peace. She seems to have hope. She doesn’t always have everything together all the time, and I notice that—it’s not that she’s perfect and it’s not that she lives without strife, and struggle, and tribulation—but she has peace, and hope, and joy and I see that in her.” As Christians, we should live lives like that so we are emulatable. Those types of lives and examples require hard work. They require hard work relationally in the way that we invest in people. They require hard work in the way that we worship God and are obedient to His Word. They require hard work—and that’s why examples can be so helpful.

A lot of things in life are relative. What we compare ourselves to really puts things in perspective. For instance, if I go downstairs to the Treehouse, which is our children’s ministry, and I am there with our five and six year olds, I’m a very tall, large person. But, if I walk into an NBA locker room, or an NFL football locker room, I’m a short, small person. But, I’m a person—so am I big or am I small? It’s relative. Who are you standing beside? It’s just relative. Wealth is another thing that’s relative. People in America like to poor-mouth and say, “Well, I’m just poor.” No, you’re not poor. If you ate food today, you are ahead of about eighty percent of the world.[[83]](#footnote-83) A third of the world eats about every other day on a good stretch. A large percentage of the world eats once a day and it’s usually going to be rice, or beans, or lentils, or something like that. People have to compare themselves to the right things to understand where they are at in life.

Our spiritual lives should be like that. What are you comparing yourself to? You should be able to look back at where you were…we should all be able to look back at where we were when Jesus saved us and in the early steps of our growth and say, “I’ve grown a lot since then.” I know that for me, I can look back at the person I was as a new Christian and it almost seems like a different human. That should be true of each of us. But we should be able to set our eyes on something down the road that is more like Jesus and then strive to attain that, and examples will help us along the way. Because, as Thomas Brooks says, “Example is the most powerful rhetoric.” We need examples in our lives.

So, the first part of Philippians 2, that I am going to read again—we’ve already preached through this and talked through this. I’m going to begin in verse 1 and read down to our text tonight, which is verse 19. I’m going to read eighteen verses and here’s what I want you to notice in this text that we just spent the last three or four weeks working through. This is a text that lays out for us Christian precepts. As a Christian, if you want to know how to live your life, Philippians 2:1-16 is a text that’s full of precepts, instructions, commands, and direction, that say, “Here’s how you live your life as a Christian.” You don’t have to figure this out on your own. The Bible tells us how to live our lives. Things like don’t complain and don’t gripe. Don’t tell me why work was so hard last week—rejoice in the fact that God gave you a job. Don’t tell me how awful it is that so-and-so is sick or that you personally were facing some difficulty this past week that you couldn’t overcome, but rather rejoice in the fact that the sufferings of this present life are not worth comparing to the glory that’s going to be revealed in Christ Jesus. These are precepts that we’ve been given. Don’t be selfish. Don’t be self-centered. Don’t always be thinking about yourself, but be thinking about others. These are the things that we’ve been told. So, let’s read this. Philippians 2:1.

Before I read it…Listen to this. Read along and absorb this. Don’t check out when the Word of God is being read. Now that we’ve preached through this, let’s listen to the beauty of this passage and the poetry of this passage. The epic nature of this passage is really, really powerful.

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

12Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

So, what you have in that passage is a lot of precepts. Here is how you should live your life. Here are principles, and commands, and instructions. Now, beginning in verse 17, Paul is going to give us examples. We have been given one example in that first 16 verses, and that example is Jesus. So, Paul said to live your life like Jesus, who humbled himself in this way. He is giving us Christ as the ultimate example, and in the Christian life Christ is always going to be the ultimate example for us. So, like the writer of Hebrews says, “Look to Jesus—He’s the author and perfecter of your faith.” One of the most valuable things we can do in our lives is read about Jesus. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are particularly the books of the Bible that tell the story of Jesus. So, we learn from Jesus’ life. We look to Jesus and we ask ourselves the question, “Am I living like Jesus? Am I learning from Jesus?”

But now, Paul is going to give us three more examples who are fully human but not fully God as well. Jesus is the God-man. But now he’s going to give us three examples of men who have followed after Christ. What he is doing is he is saying to us, “You can do this. You can live this life. The Christian life can be lived faithfully and effectively no matter what the odds are.” And he’s going to paint us a picture of three men who faced unbelievable difficulty—greater than any addiction than any of you might have faced and greater than any strife or hardship that I may have ever faced in my life. Because the context that they lived their lives in and the world that they lived in was so much more complex and difficult than the world we live in.

Do I look to the needs of others? Timothy certainly did. He is very amiable. He uses the words, “Cheered of the news” and then he continues in verse 20, “For I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.” Now, this is something. Paul had been all over the world. He was a capital “A” Apostle. An Apostle with a capital “A” was an Apostle with a position of authority that God would appoint someone to. So, kids, listen up. When you see in the Bible that someone is an Apostle, Jesus told them they were going to be an Apostle, and a discipler, and a preacher. So, Jesus would tell them that they were going to go out and preach, and help start churches, and things like that. So, that means an Apostle with a big “A.” But then, Apostles could appoint small “a” apostles. You see this throughout Scripture. Paul appointed a lot of people. He appointed Titus to appoint elders in all of the island of Crete and to establish Church leaders and different people to different offices. Paul worked throughout the known world at that time. He traveled the entire civilized world and planted churches on three continents. He discipled Church leaders and he says, “There’s not another human being alive like Timothy.” That’s a big statement. If I could get to the end of my life and have someone like Paul say, “No one is as faithful as you,” that would be awesome. But you know what? Most of us disqualify ourselves every day from ever having something like that said about us.

To me, one of the things that gives so much value to this, when this statement is made about Timothy, is knowing what Timothy faced. Let me just quickly walk you through a beautiful biography of a man totally committed and surrendered to the Gospel. In Acts 16, we are introduced to Timothy on the heels of a team that is fragmented because there has been conflict. The team had busted up. Paul demanded a lot from people. He would go to unreached people, and cross mountains and deserts. He would cross oceans. He got guys shipwrecked and beaten up by robbers and thieves. There was one point in the story where Paul was taking a team on his first missionary journey and they were going to cross a mountainous region because there was a group of unreached people. So, imagine up where we have missionaries in sensitive locations and having them see that Jesus is God. He’s not just a prophet. He wasn’t made but He is begotten and He is eternal. He is the same as God. They are three in One. These formerly pagan people are embracing the Trinitarian God. Jesus is God but He’s not exactly like God. These people are getting it. They are getting the Gospel. Well, Paul was wanting to go to a group of people like that far across a mountainous region. You can read about it in, in think, Acts 13. He says, “We’ve got to go over there and take the Gospel to those people.” Well, this was in a day when they didn’t have North Face, or Patagonia, or Nike, or Under Armour. They had not yet created puffy, goosedown jackets. You see guys that climb to the top of Mount Everest and they are wearing all this gear. But Paul was going to cross this treacherous mountain terrain wearing nothing but flip-flops and a bathrobe. And he was carrying a knapsack slung over his shoulder and taking Jesus’ words literally, like, “Don’t take food. I’ll provide it for you along the way.” Paul said, “There are people over there who need the Gospel and we need to go take the Gospel to them.” But, this guy named John Mark, who was on his team, said, “Uh, I’m out. That’s not for me.” He counts the cost and says he’s not going because it’s too hard. He’s like, “Y’all are crazy. If we go there we’ll get robbed.” It’s like people today saying, “Why would you take the Gospel to ISIS or Al Qaida? Why would you go to the Himalayas? Those people don’t want the Gospel.” You have a lot of that type of arrogance in the Church today, where people say things like, “Why would you adopt a kid from Africa when there are kids here who have needs?” I’ve heard that one about fifty times. “Why would you send young people into harm’s way in places like South Sudan and West Africa?” A lot of people don’t understand the cost of taking the Gospel to the ends of the Earth. At this point in John Mark’s life he didn’t’ understand it. Well, I think he understood it but he wasn’t willing to buy into it, so he quit, because it was too hard to follow Paul. John Mark was too concerned about his own good and his own needs.

So, Timothy gets picked up in Acts 16 on the next missionary journey. John Mark wanted to rejoin the team when they were getting ready to start their second missionary journey. He was like, “I’m good, man. I’m good to go. I promise that this time you can count on me,” and Paul was like, “Absolutely not. You have proven yourself unfaithful.” He wouldn’t let him join the team, there was a bunch of drama, and the team split. Part of the team left and went one way and Paul and Silas went another way. Then, they came to these places called Derbe and Lystra and they met a young man named Timothy. That’s in Acts 16. It says that Timothy was from a multi-cultural family. His mother and grandmother were Jewish and came to faith in Jesus, and his father was a Gentile, Greek or Roman. We know that Timothy was not circumcised, so we know that he was raised in the Roman world. So, they met Timothy and he became a Christian, and he decided that he was going to follow them and go with them. In Acts 16:3, it says that they circumcised him because they were going to go to the Jews. This was a man in the earliest stages of his Christian faith and he was willing to do whatever it took to take the Gospel to the nations. John Mark wouldn’t go through treacherous mountains. In all fairness to John Mark, at the end of his life Paul said, “Send John Mark to me. He is profitable and very useful for ministry.” God grew him up and I think God used Paul’s conflict with him to grow him up.

But, from day one, Timothy had a unique place in Paul’s life. Paul went to Timothy’s town and in Acts 16:2 it says that he was well spoken of by the people in his city. Everyone knew about this young man named Timothy and he was very well spoken of. He ended up joining the team with Paul, and Paul had him circumcised. You’re probably talking about a six-week healing process in a time when there were no hospitals and no anesthesia. This man was literally brought under the knife and accepted it as part of his call. He didn’t complain about the fact that Paul told Titus not to get circumcised because they needed to send him to Gentiles. Timothy didn’t say, “Ooh, ooh…can we trade teams? Let me go to the Gentiles.” He didn’t do that. He didn’t have a wrong idea of comparison. He just said, “What is the cost of getting the Gospel to the nations? I’ll pay that.” He was willing to do whatever it took.

So, right off you see that this young man is so focused on the call. In Acts 16:11, he was with the initial team that came to Philippi. Timothy was a young believer and new team member when they came to Philippi. Remember back when we started this study in Philippians, we looked at what the background to the Church in Philippi was, and the first believers were Lydia, the Philippians jailer, and the demon-possessed sorcerer girl. Remember that? Well, Timothy was there when all of that went down. He was there when the church in Philippi formed. He stayed with Paul and when they left there they went to Thessalonica. Paul got beaten up there and then they left there and went to Berea. I think he got beaten up there. Then, Paul split and went to Athens, and Timothy and some other guys stayed there. They moved around Macedonia and then they met back up with Paul in Athens and Corinth. The bottom line is this—Timothy goes everywhere that Paul goes, so Timothy gets beaten, he gets shipwrecked, he gets hungry. He has proven himself faithful to the Gospel. Why? Because in Timothy’s life it’s all about Jesus. It wasn’t about Timothy. That’s what we learn from Timothy. Timothy wasn’t Timothy’s big deal—Jesus was Timothy’s big deal. Timothy cared more about the name of Christ and the advance of the Gospel than he cared about his own comfort.

And this wasn’t natural for Timothy; it didn’t come easy for Timothy. From a young age, 1 Timothy 4:12 tells us that Timothy was put in a pastoral position. He was being confronted in a hostile church in Ephesus. Ephesus was crazy. Remember, if you read in Acts 19-22, you will see a lot of Timothy’s travel with that team. They get to Ephesus and they are there for a long time. There was a huge riot that broke out—probably the biggest riot that ever broke out in New Testament Church history, and Timothy was right in the middle of that thing. Then, Paul says, “Okay, you’re going to be the pastor here.” They were in a pagan city where people were out of their minds. They were rioting and killing people. Think about the most hostile environment, and Paul put Timothy in charge there. It scared Timothy to death and he was freaked out. And Paul says things like, “Don’t let people despise your youth. Don’t tell me how young you are and why you can’t do this. God has appointed you to this.” Timothy would always embrace God’s calling on his life regardless of Timothy’s own desire for comfort. He might say, “I’m too young. I’m thirty years old. You’re going to put me in charge of this church in this city that’s crazy? I was raised by my grandmama. I can’t do this,” but Paul would say, “Don’t you dare let anybody despise your youth. Don’t you dare let anybody despise your upbringing.” Timothy was weak in a lot of ways and I think we can take a huge amount of encouragement from that, because Timothy’s strength did not come from the fact that he knew the Bible or that he was naturally bold.

Psychologists will tell us that people fall into two or three categories. The two main ones are fight or flight. Some of you, when there is conflict or pressure you prefer to move away from that and just avoid it. Others of you prefer to create conflict and pressure and definitely, if it comes at you, you’ll run right back at it. We tend to run in those two avenues. That’s when you get a husband and a wife together who are both naturally headstrong, it’s a constant conflict. But, a lot of time, if they surrender to the Holy Spirit, those two will do better quicker because they work through those things, where with two people who want to avoid conflict, they can’t really avoid conflict. It stays there. It’s like an ostrich sticking its head in the sand—it stays there. The conflict is still there but we’ve just avoided addressing it.

So, Timothy was someone who it appears was naturally not confrontational or bold. We get this from several passages; 1 Timothy 4:12 being one of them. Also, in 1 Corinthians 16:10, we know that he is naturally reserved. Paul was sending him to another crazy church in Corinth. The two craziest churches in the Bible are at Ephesus and Corinth. They are crazy. We were laughing about this in the pastors’ meeting today—at Corinth, Paul had to tell them in the first letter he wrote to them, “Hey, it’s not okay for a dude to sleep with his mom. Stop it and knock it off. That’s point number one. Point number two, it’s not okay to get drunk at the Lord’s Supper. Stop it and knock it off.”

Now, at Red Oak the most you’re going to get is a sugar rush or your insulin levels are going to go through the roof because we serve grape juice. We are in the Bible Belt and we don’t do wine, so we serve grape juice. And, too many of you are recovering alcoholics and we are sensitive to that. It’s grape juice so here you go. So, the worst thing you might experience here is a sugar high after church. Well, at Corinth, they were getting straight hammered on the Lord’s Supper night. They were fat from eating too much, and getting drunk and passing out, and Timothy was not like that at all. This was a reserved man. Paul also told him in 2 Timothy 1, “Hey, man, God did not give you a spirit of timidity and fear. I know that’s natural for you but you’re not supposed to be scared. You can do this.” Timothy was this young, timid, dude that God was sending, through Paul, to the Church at Corinth, where they were partying at church. They were getting drunk, bringing in prostitutes, and practicing incest. So, Timothy went from Ephesus, where he was leading a church in the most hostile city in the world, and then he was in Corinth where the Christians were so messed up. None of this was easy for him.

I think a lot of us get discouraged because we look at other Christians and we think it seems so easy for them. They have more money. Their marriage seems better. Their kids behave more. They drive a nicer car. They don’t have the upbringing I have. You can always make an excuse for why you are screwed up, but the bottom line is that sin is real and only Jesus gives us hope. And Timothy understood that. You can blame the fact that you didn’t have x, y, or z as a child, or you can blame the fact that this thing happened to you or that thing happened, but listen, the bottom line is that when Jesus saves us He sets us on a course of purpose. If you want purpose in your life that comes from Jesus. That comes from the salvation that He gives us, and Timothy understood that. This wasn’t easy for him.

In 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul tells Timothy, “You know what you need? To take some wine for your stomach because you’re getting sick all the time. Timothy, you are frail, you’re puny, you’re sick all the time, you’re scared of confrontation.” Does this sound like a bold proclaimer of the Gospel who will do whatever it takes to reach the nations? It doesn’t. But we know that he was those things. He was bold in his proclamation of the Gospel. He did go to the ends of the Earth. He was willing to go to prison. Paul asked for Timothy in his dying wish. He said, “Come see me, please. I want you here with me when I die because I am passing the mantle to you.” Timothy gives us an example of what it’s like to get outside of what’s comfortable for you day in and day out, and be the person that God has designed and intended for you to be, not what your own presuppositions or your own backstory are, or what the world tells you. You can be the man or the woman that God has called you to be. Timothy gives us that example. We need to believe it.

At one point, Paul called Timothy, “My true son.” His love for the Gospel and his love for Jesus always won out. Though he was reserved and quiet-spirited he never shrinks back. When he is going to the Church in Corinth, in 1 Corinthians 16:10, and he is bringing a letter to Corinth, and he’s going to be their pastor. Timothy is bringing them this letter and I wonder if Paul said, “Don’t read it—there’s some stuff in there about you.” He brings them the letter and it says, “Here’s my commission. I’m your boss now. I’m the leader of this church.” Then, we get all the way to the last chapter of 1 Corinthians, in chapter 16, and Paul tells them, “Hey, take it easy on Timothy. In fact, you guys need to encourage him,” as if to say, “He’s pretty freaked out about this assignment.” But, you know what? Freaked out or not, he didn’t shrink back. He didn’t back off. He did what he was called to do. Why? Because for Timothy, it wasn’t about his nervousness, or his intimidation, or about his anxiety—it was about Jesus. It was always all about Jesus. That’s the way that Timothy lived his life. He was a man of compassion and companionship and in the end it was Timothy that Paul asked for, because he was so faithful. In verse 22, Paul tells us,

“But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.”

Paul says, “He’s like my son. You also know he’s proven himself.” He’s not a Johnny-come-lately but he’s proven himself. He’s had ample time and opportunity to fail yet he has remained faithful. He could have made excuses by this point but he has not. There can be no doubting or questioning Timothy’s faithfulness or commitment. He is a man or integrity and work ethic. He’s a Gospel man. He’s been Paul’s “yes” man.

I love to be around “yes” men and “yes” women—people who tell you why you can get something done and why it’s going to work. Not complainers or grumblers but also people without a negative attitude. Timothy was fully committed to Paul. He would go anywhere and do anything. When he met Paul in Acts, he was joining a splintered team that had experienced easy quitters and division. Paul was not easy to follow. He chose the hard path. He went to the untouchables, the unreached, and the unwanted. Paul crossed mountains. He wrecked boats. He got beaten by people from three different governments on three different continents and in a couple of dozen cities. He was thrown in jails everywhere from Spain to North Africa. As many religions came after him as didn’t. He was forsaken by his own people and Timothy stayed faithful to him through it all, so that in the end of Paul’s life he would say, “I don’t have anyone else like Timothy. Can you learn something from Timothy’s life? Yeah. Can we learn from Timothy? Yeah, we could be more like Timothy. Timothy is an example we can learn from.

But, Paul gives us three examples to put this within reach. He gives us himself, he gives us Timothy, and now he gives us a man named Epaphroditus. He gives us three examples and three pictures so that we can say, “I can identify with this guy. I can learn from this guy.” We can’t say, “I quit.” We can’t say, “I can’t.” We’ve been given examples of those people who did the impossible. They were faithful, they followed the Lord, they rose above circumstances, and they lived out the Gospel. These men illustrate selfless, humble, spiritual service and we need those examples. These three men are friends. Their lives are intertwined. They give us three specific and unique examples and they also show us how to do this all together as a team. All of them were radically saved by the Gospel—Paul out of Pharisaical Judaism, Timothy from a Roman-Greek culture and pagan ideology. Epaphroditus was named after a Greek goddess; a sex goddess. He was from a pagan family. Somewhere along the way he got saved.

I get tickled when we get updates about Muhammad Ali getting saved overseas where our missionaries are. We heard about that tonight and how awesome is that. If you are new to Red Oak, or you’re visiting, you might be thinking, “I thought he died recently.” This is a different Muhammad Ali. This guy died recently as well, amen? He went from death to life. He was buried with Christ and raised, and he is now walking with the Lord. His name is Muhammad Ali. But what cracks me up isn’t that he has the same name as the boxer because that wasn’t even the boxer’s real name. The boxer’s real name was Cassius Clay. Muhammad is the most popular name of Islam. And at some point in the last two weeks, our friend Gulzar has said these words, “I baptize you, Muhammad, my brother, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” And, at some point, Epaphroditus was baptized in the name of Jesus. He had the name of a Greek goddess and I love the fact he said, “I’m not changing my name. That reminds me of who I was.” Timothy didn’t change his name. Timothy’s name means ‘worshipper’ or ‘god-honored,’ but it was a pagan god that they were probably talking about. He’s like, “I’ll keep that name. We will just redeem that name.”

Many of us have testimonies where we look back and we think, “I want to forget who I was.” Don’t forget who you were. Be reminded of the goodness of God in your life. Watch redemption play out. Don’t run from the fact that you used to be an addict. Don’t run from the fact that you hit your wife before you met Jesus. Embrace who you really are in the flesh so that you can see the redeeming faithfulness of Jesus in your life, and so that you won’t ever become that thing or that person again. Embrace that. Jesus has purpose for you. Epaphroditus was named after a sex goddess in a pagan, Greek city. That’s good. Jesus can redeem anything.

So, in verse 25, we are introduced to Epaphroditus. Paul says,

“I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need.”

The first thing Paul does is that he gives us five descriptive words in that first verse about Epaphroditus. The first thing is that he calls him “brother.” So, he’s a believer. I love going back to one of the first sermons in Philippians, when Rob talked about the use of the word “brother.” It’s such a beautiful word. We are brothers and sisters and we are knit together with a family-type bond through Christ. But, when Paul calls him a brother, he’s recognizing the equality of Epaphroditus to himself. A lot of people think that the preacher is more holy or the worship leader is more holy. They think, “I can’t be as holy as that person or this person.” But, I’m sure that everywhere Paul went, people were like, “Look, it’s Paul.” But, Paul is saying, “You know what? We are just redeemed by the blood of Jesus. Epaphroditus is like me. I’m not better than him or greater than him.” It is really neat that Paul is giving him equality in Christ.

But the second thing is that he calls him a fellow worker. I like to connect the second descriptive term, “fellow worker,” with the fourth one, “your messenger.” Epaphroditus has labored with Paul. Serving with Paul was a hard task. It was hard work. He ran the throttle wide open in ministry. He didn’t take many breaks or back off. He was wide open in the throttle and guys like that are hard to follow. As a leader, I know that for me when I sit down with somebody and say, “Here’s what I’d like to do…boom, boom, boom...,” I’m open to discussion and ideas but what I don’t like is for somebody to say, “No, that won’t work. Here’s why.” Guys like Paul want to hear how we are going to make this happen and how we are going to get it done. I kind of identify with that. And Epaphroditus was the kind of guy that Paul says about, “He’s a fellow worker. He’s on board. He’ll say, ‘We will get it done whatever it takes. I won’t tell you three reasons why we can’t do this.’” In that sense, he’s a yes man, too. But he’s proven it because he’s a messenger sent from Philippi.

Here’s the story of how Epaphroditus gets there. Let me read verses 25-30 again. We read it earlier but let me read it again.

“I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, 26 for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. 29 So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, 30 for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.”

So, here’s the background story. Paul is in jail—we know that from the first chapter. Paul is in jail, under house arrest, chained to a guard. The church at Philippi sent a financial gift and a person to be there to sort of be an attendant to Paul. Paul is under house arrest and so Epaphroditus was sent from the Philippian church to go serve alongside of Paul to help him and be an attendant to him. He brought a monetary gift so he could buy food and things that he needed. It wasn’t like prison in America where you are served three squares a day and you have a bed and three meals. It wasn’t like that. You could be in prison there and die of starvation if someone from the outside wasn’t helping you. So, the church at Philippi sent food, money, financial resources, and things like that to support Paul in prison, and Epaphroditus was the guy that they chose to go there as their representative and to basically be an attendant. Paul said, “He ministered to me. He served alongside of me.” So, the fifth thing Paul says is, “He was a minister to my need.”

Now, it’s 800 miles from Philippi to where Paul is in prison. Most commentators say it was probably about a six week journey one way. So, this man traveled six weeks one way to get there. So, when Paul says, “He’s my fellow worker and he’s your messenger,” there is a lot he is saying. He’s saying that he’s been faithful and he fulfilled the task. It’s hard to get people to knock off an afternoon a week or a couple of days a month to do some serious ministry task as a church. But here you have a guy that says, “I’ll go. I’ll go.” We have Blue and Britt here tonight, so make sure you get to talk to them. I love hearing Blue tell the story of how the Lord put feet to the direction that they are going on the missionary field. What happened is that I called him and he was in someone else’s basement doing some work and I said, “Hey, man, here’s a need. We feel like you and Britt could go and fill this need. Somebody needs to go to this people group in this difficult place.” You guys know where they are serving. And Blue said, “Okay!” And I remember getting off the phone and thinking, “I wonder if that’s it? I wonder what I’m supposed to do now.” But I didn’t have to do anything, because when he said, “Okay,” his yes was his yes. The next thing I knew is that they were somewhere in another country learning another language so that they could learn the next language, because they needed to know the first one to learn the next one. So, people who say, “Yes, I’ll go,” are what makes the Church effective to the nations. And Epaphroditus was one of those guys. He was a fellow worker. He would do what it took.

Then, Paul says he’s a fellow soldier. This is a really powerful Greek image because of two things. One, there were enemies in the Church. Paul addresses them later in the letter to the Philippians. Later, he says, “Beware of these people who are among you. They are trying to create problems. They are your enemies.” There were enemies to the advance of the Gospel. So, Paul had enemies. He even had enemies in prison. Epaphroditus came alongside of him in that fight and didn’t shrink back from that. Talk about a place where you are outnumbered by people who want to kill you, but Epaphroditus was like, “I’m with you, man. I’ve got your back.”

But there’s the phrase “fellow soldier.” In our day, a common soldier can win different awards, like medals of valor, or a bronze star, or a silver star, or a distinguished service cross. The highest award a soldier can win is the Congressional Medal of Honor[[84]](#footnote-84), which is given for an unbelievable amount of valor in combat. So, they would do this ceremony where a common soldier would be elevated because of his valor in combat and they would say that he is equal in value to this army as the commanding officer over this army. So, it’s a really cool word play where Paul is saying, “You think I’m doing heavy duty work? You think I’m advancing the Gospel from prison? Well, Epaphroditus is just like me.” So, Epaphroditus is a fellow worker and a fellow soldier. Paul is really speaking a lot of value into this man and using very strong word pictures.

Down in verse 29, when he is telling the Philippians how to receive him, he uses the word “honor.” In our culture honor is a big deal, but in that culture honor was everything. Being honored was the ultimate experience. So, in verses 26-27, Paul continues to describe this guy and he said that he loved the Church in Philippi so much that he didn’t want them to be anxious or to worry. He uses the word “distressed.” What has happened is that Epaphroditus got sick and was about to die. It may have been some time on that six week journey and he could have caught something like malaria or something from the water. Who knows? We are talking about the first century third world. Disease kills people all the time in those cultures. So, Epaphroditus was dying and all he was concerned about was that the church back home not hear that he’s dying. Then, he gets really distressed when he finds out that they know that he is dying. I think it’s interesting. Part of it is that he’s so focused on the mission that he doesn’t want the church to be discouraged. I was telling the pastors earlier that I kind of identify with this part of it. Epaphroditus doesn’t want them to see him as a failure. He’s like, “They chose me. They sent me. They gave me one task, which was to get here. I told them I’d get it done and I’m laying here dying, completely ineffective.” He is completely distressed over the emotional and spiritual health of the church. Why? Because for Epaphroditus, it wasn’t about Epaphroditus—it was about Jesus. It was all about Jesus, the Church, the Bride of Christ. It was about others. He cared what they thought. He wanted them to be strong, and healthy, and encouraged. So, Paul is sending him back.

The word “distressed” is the same word used when Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, and He is praying before the Father, and he’s sweating drops of blood. He is distressed. This is the same, exact word. Epaphroditus is beside himself thinking that the church may be affected by his hardship. Why? Because he doesn’t care about himself; he cares about others. He is fleshing out for us Philippians 2:1-16. He’s showing us an example of selflessness. He’s not saying, “I’m sick as a dog. Please bring me something else to drink. Bring me some mediine.” He’s on death’s door and all he cares about is the Church, and the mission of the Church, and the advance of the Gospel.

In verse 8, Jesus was obedient in His own distress to death, even death on a cross. Epaphroditus was also, even in his own distress, obedient even if it killed him. But, Paul says in verse 27, God had mercy on him. He was alive because of the sovereign and merciful hand of the Lord. Praise the Lord for His mercies. Paul was the recipient of God’s mercy when Epaphroditus was spared. So, the sparing of Epaphroditus was this beautiful outpouring of God’s mercy. We need to be careful in our lives that we are recognizing God’s mercies. Lamentations 3:22 says,

“His mercies are new every morning.”

Psalm 23:6 says that all the days of our lives goodness and mercy will follow us. God’s mercy is seen in so many different ways in our lives, and in Epaphroditus’s situation Paul is recognizing it, and he’s saying to the church back in Philippi that God’s mercy is what saved him. God is sovereign and He’s merciful.

Listen, if you’ve ever questioned of doubted your belief in God, where you said, “If God is so powerful, then He wouldn’t let bad things happen. So, He must be merciful but not powerful enough to stop it,” or you’ve said, “If God is so merciful, then why would He let everything go on like it is if He has the power to stop it”—So, it’s either, “I can see where God is maybe merciful but He’s not powerful,” or “I can see where God is powerful but He must not be merciful or the world wouldn’t be in the condition it’s in.” Listen—God is both, but God is also sovereign, so He is always working for His glory and your good. And if God takes Epaphroditus’s life, Paul worships God because of it. But God chooses to spare Him and Paul says that it’s because of God’s mercy. Some of us probably need to go back to places and moments in our lives where we forgot to thank God for His mercy. It’s a miracle that we are sitting here today, and that goodness and mercy continues to follow us.

So, we get to the last part of the passage in verse 28, where Paul is talking about sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi, and it seems like he’s sending him prematurely. He’s like, “I’m sending him back so you can rejoice in seeing him again.” It’s like, “I know you guys sent him here so he could stay with me and help me, but I’m sending him back to you. He brought the money and he brought the letter. We are doing well. But, I’m sending him back to you because I know that word got back to you that he might be dead.” There’s no internet, there’s no telephone, there is not good mail correspondence—so, you put a letter in the hand of a trustworthy courier or messenger and he takes the letter. So Paul says, “I’m going to send to you Epaphroditus, so then you will know that he’s alive. Then you can rejoice. Be eager to receive him because he was sick. Receive him with all joy and welcome him, but don’t just welcome him, also honor him.” Verse 29,

“Receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men.”

“Such men.” He is worthy of honor. Honor was such a big deal to them. So, Paul says,

“Honor him, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.”

So, here’s the takeaway in conclusion. What an amazing picture of how to serve others. But there are three things we need to recognize.

Serving others will cost us a lot. It cost Timothy his entire life. He never settled down anywhere for very long. He was never comfortable. He had to face his insecurities, his fear, his small physical stature, his stomach ailments. He faced these things on a daily basis and overcome the obstacles in his way so he could be faithful to what the Lord had called him to.

Epaphroditus was willing to travel six weeks on foot, fighting a deadly illness, to make sure that he got to Paul and saw him face-to-face, to deliver the offering and say, “I made it. Please don’t let them know that I got sick.” He had selflessness. For these guys, it was all about Jesus and it cost them everything. In the end, all of these men died because of their faithfulness to the Gospel.

It’s going to cost us a lot if we serve others. We have been called through these passages in the last couple of weeks to serve one another, to be faithful to each other, to serve our community, to love people well, and it’s going to cost us physically, spiritually, emotionally, and monetarily.

Number two. Deep relations are formed when we are on mission together. If we are going to be a strong church that is strong together, and if we are going to be knit together, it is going to be because we are on mission together; likeminded in the calling, excited about what’s going on in South Asia, excited about what’s going on in the community with Pinwheel[[85]](#footnote-85), excited about what’s going on at Chestnut Mountain Ranch with the Clodfelters, excited to see the Berries here and embrace them. Do y’all know, when I say that the Berries are here, that’s the people that we have prayed for. For you all who are newer, we spent weeks praying for them by name every time we met. We sent you updates about their daughter who has gone to be with the Lord. You prayed diligently when Little and I traveled out there to spend time with them and to help them in the memorial service. They are here with us! What an incredible age we live in. The Lanes were here with us this summer. We are knit together through mission as a church. It’s a beautiful thing. Deep relationships are formed with we are on mission together.

Number three. The Church has always been sustained and built up by unsung heroes. Who was Epaphroditus? Nobody knows. We just have this one little thing about him. He’s not planting churches. We never hear about him again. There are huge names of any era in church history—praise the Lord for them—but what has advanced the work of the Church in every period of time in history has been the faithfulness of the people who sit in seats on Sundays. On the Lord’s Day we meet and then we go on mission into your arena of life. Whatever your business, or your profession, or your family, or whatever your situation, are you on mission this week, because the Church advances through the faithfulness of unsung heroes. For us, we need to think back to earlier words in this letter and, in humility, consider others more important than ourselves.

Let’s pray.

Lord, I pray that as we reflect on the examples that these men have given us, that we would learn from them, that we would be convicted by them, and their faithfulness, and obedience, but that we would see that these guys weren’t beyond normal. There was nothing special or spectacular about them. They had crazy pasts and crazy family situations. They came from crazy cities and they lived in a pagan world. You did great things with them and they were just faithful to carry out the precepts and principles of Philippians 2:1-16. They lived like Jesus. Paul lived like Jesus. Help us to see that there are those that we can imitate and learn from. Help us to be imitatable. I pray that we would love each other well and be on mission together. Help us to count the cost and do whatever it takes to reach the nations with the Gospel and see the Church grow on every continent, in every tongue, and every tribe. Help us to see widows and orphans cared for and to love people well. Help us to do that. Help us to not say, “I can’t do that because”…and then list a group of reasons, but help us to always say, “Yeah, I’ll figure it out, and here are a dozen reasons why I can’t say ‘no.’” When there is a need, I pray that every one of us would be willing to step in and give of our physical resources, our bodies, our energy, our minds, and our financial resources; that we would give sacrificially like the church at Philippi did so that the Church will have the funds it needs to fund the work of the Gospel. What a gift to be in a church where nobody gets paid. It’s so unique. Nobody here gets any money. We are advancing the Gospel because these people are faithful. So, help us to be sacrificial in our giving in the uniqueness of our situation. I pray that we would never back down, never bow out, and be unwavering. Timothy, in all of his weaknesses and insecurities, was so bold to proclaim the Gospel and lead the Church. Epaphroditus, on death’s doorstep, was unwilling to waver from the mission you called him to. Both of them did it because, first and foremost, they loved Jesus. Just as Paul said, they loved Him and they were faithful to the mission. But they also loved the Church and they cared about the people that they were shepherding and leading. They cared about the people they were worshipping alongside of. Help us to be a church like that and make a difference in this generation. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

(Rob Conti)

It was awesome worshipping with y’all. It was so good to worship alongside of you guys. I do have a number of announcements so I ask you to stay locked in with me. We are going to be starting church at 5:50 from now on—this is a trick to get you here on time.

The second announcement is that on Wednesday nights we are going to be starting a youth discipleship group. So, beginning on October 12, we will start at 6pm at the Holloway’s. That will be for all youth for 7th through 12th grades. So, please, if you are interested in that, see the Holloways and we will get you plugged in. Or see any of the pastors and we will get your kids plugged into that.

The next announcement. In light of the encouragement and the challenge that we just received from the testimony of these three examples, is that we have a pretty urgent request that has been sent to us from Chestnut Mountain Ranch. We support that ministry and specifically support Bradley and Robin Clodfelter who are there from this church, as house parents. They have an urgent need for a roof to get done, so we need eight to ten guys to go up there from October 6-9. This is short notice but it is an awesome opportunity to go serve with the work that needs to get done for this boys’ home. So, if you are interested in going on that trip, please come up here and see Brody by the stage after the announcements are done and we read the benediction. This is an opportunity. With a trip like that, the unity and the bond that will form between the guys that go, and the discipleship that can take place, is so awesome. It’s just serving. It may cost you. You may have to take off work and it may not make sense for you to do it other than it’s an opportunity for you to serve and it’s an area where God has gifted you to serve. So, please come see Brody if you are at all interested in that.

Next Sunday, we will meet in here at the normal time of 5:50, and we will worship the Lord. From here, we are going to have a baptism service and eat afterward. So, we are going to be baptizing Alani Davis because she follows Jesus, and we are going to be baptizing Molly Conti, so don’t miss that. I’m going to be here. That’s a big deal. So don’t miss that.

Again, if you haven’t signed up for membership class and you would like to, we are starting a new round of classes beginning the first Wednesday in October and it will go every Wednesday in October. So, please email me or see me after church if you are interested in that.

So, there are a lot of exciting things going on. So often, people ask us where they can get plugged into Red Oak. We don’t have a lot of programs right now, and maybe one day we will, but really what we desire for you to do is to make yourself available in other people’s lives in this church. Our primary way of doing that right now is through discipleship groups that meet in people’s homes throughout the week. So, if you are not part of that, please contact me or see me. We would love to get you plugged into a discipleship group where relationships are built and we can minister to one another by the gifts that God has given us. He has given each one of us gifts to be used for the building up and the encouragement of the Church. So, please be involved in that.

This is from Philippians 4:8. Stand with me as we read God’s Word.

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

I love you, church.

October 2, 2016

Philippians 3:1-11

Rob Conti

Sometime in August of 1998, I had hair and down to my chin and sideburns. You might think, that was a good look back then. That’s what I thought, too. I had just finished high school. --- I’ve got this. This is what I remember. I had no claim to anything like what would be called righteousness, purity, or goodness. I didn’t know what the word “righteousness” meant. I remember just drowning in depression. I have these normal tricks that work when I get choked up. I have little pictures in my mind—one is of a rubber duck. That usually snaps me right out of it but I’m struggling. For me, my issue wasn’t self-righteousness. I wasn’t deceived into thinking that somehow I had been good enough. My issue was that I knew the truth and I just continued to live in sin. I couldn’t stop—I couldn’t break it. And I remember hearing the Gospel. I remember the Word of God being read and meeting Jesus, and seeing Jesus in His holiness, knowing that He was perfect and I wasn’t. I remember it being almost like a relief of knowing that I deserve Hell and that He would be good to punish me. There was this beauty in that and I remember the unbelievable release in the grace of knowing that I’m forgiven; that this story that I heard so much was true—that yes, I deserved that punishment and I deserved that Hell, but then the fact that Jesus, God, in His grace and His mercy, took my Hell for me, and that what He was offering me—I don’t even know if that’s the right way to say it—what He gave me was forgiveness. He removed my guilt and He removed the shame and, in its place, there was hope, and there was life, and there was joy, and there was this understanding that Jesus is better and Jesus is worthy. Whatever I had been living my life for—Jesus is better. Whatever I was holding onto, rather than pursuing Jesus, that Jesus is better. Whatever feeling or relationship was consuming my time and my energy—Jesus was better.

Tonight, we are going to get a glimpse into a totally different kind of testimony. We are going to see Paul’s testimony and it is so opposite of what I just shared. It’s so different. If we went around the room, those of you who have been in membership class, and those of you who are about to do that, we take time and get to hear a little bit of each other’s stories in that setting. I hope you do that and I hope you hear each other’s stories of how Christ saved you, because for each one of us our testimony will be unique, but they will all point to the same thing. They will all point to the glory of Jesus. They will all point to glorying and taking pride in boasting not in our own selves, not in our own works, not in our own accomplishments, not in our own past sin, but they will all point to boasting in the person and the work of Jesus—boasting in His name, making Him look good. That’s what this passage tonight is all about. It’s all about seeing Jesus as exalted. There is no boasting for anybody, and there is no room for pride, or arrogance, or guilt, or shame, in the person of Jesus. When we see Jesus, when we focus on Jesus, when we find our identity in Jesus—that kills self-righteousness. That kills pride. That kills self-confidence. But it also kills guilt, and shame, and insecurities, and feelings of being unworthy. It kills it because all that remains is Jesus, and His grace, and His mercy, and it is irresistible, and you are drawn to it, and it leaves you with this motivation to live so that He might be glorified.

So, open to Philippians 3 and let’s go to work. Paul says this,

“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. 2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— 4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

So, Paul, being a good preacher, halfway through his letter, says, “Finally.” I’ve been accused of (and that’s how I take it)—being accused of—pump faking often when I preach. Especially the guys in the back who are going to come up and sing afterwards, they think I’m winding it up so they will all stand and get their earpieces back in, but I just pump faked. I’m getting the safety to bite and I still have field to cover. Here, Paul says, “Finally,” and you think, “Finally?” It’s the middle of the book. But that’s not really what he’s saying. He’s not really closing. That’s not his intention. It’s more like he’s saying, “So, then.” It is like everything that he has built on already, with the main emphasis being this beautiful picture, this hymn, this creed of who Christ is and what He’s done. In His humility, and by His example of humbling himself to the point of death, even death on a cross, and seeing our need, and seeing us as being worthy of His service by His life, and His death, and His resurrection—that built on the back of that, Paul says, “So, then….because of all of this…listen.”

“My brothers, rejoice in the Lord.”

Find your joy in Him. Find your joy because of Him. If you are going to worship, and you are going to praise, and if you are going to have joy in your life, it’s going to be in Christ—because of Christ, to Christ, in Christ. It is by Him and by His healing and saving power that we can rejoice. And it’s to Him and for Him. He has freed us. He has brought us from death to life so that we can worship Him. We can have joy—and each time Paul says it in this book—he’s already said it a couple of times and there are more to come in the book of Philippians—when Paul says “rejoice” it is in the context of some sort of trial or some sort of adversity. What he is saying is that in this life there are going to be trials. It’s going to be hard. There is going to be suffering. There is going to be persecution. Rejoice in Christ, because while your circumstances are hard, and they might change, and they will be difficult—Jesus does not change. His victory is secure and it is eternal, so rejoice in that, in Christ. Don’t look to the world for your source of joy. Don’t look to the things of this world to find glory in. You have it in Jesus so seek it there. So, Paul says, “My brothers, rejoice in Christ.” He says,

“To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.”

He’s saying, “It doesn’t bother me to be repetitive. It doesn’t bother me to say the same thing. It doesn’t bother me to keep repeating what I’m saying because it’s good for you. You’ll remember it better.” We don’t know if he means the repetition of telling them to rejoice, or some people think that maybe that in a previous letter or message that he had warned them about some false teachers. For us, we know this—there’s nothing new under the Sun and there is nothing new to the Gospel. When we preach Jesus, when we preach the Gospel, we are not bringing any new revelation. We are simply repeating the truth of the Gospel. We need it. We need to repeat it to ourselves daily. That’s why it’s good when we have fellowship with one another. When somebody is going through something, we know that there is truth to be spoken here. Sometimes, we hesitate because we think, “He knows the truth. I don’t want to seem like I’m coming across as holier than him or I know better than him.” Now, there’s a way to do it when it comes across that way. There’s a way to speak truth like a hammer. Right? There is a way to wield the sword where you hack, rather than like a surgeon to use it to heal and bring life. There’s a way to say things that is bad, but we need to speak truth to each other, in love. I know that when I am struggling that I need to hear Gospel truth. If I’ve read it, or heard it, or not, I need a brother or sister in Christ to speak that truth to me. When we do that and we do it in humility and love, the Holy Spirit will use that in that person’s life.

So, Paul says, “It doesn’t bother me to repeat myself.” Then he says this, and it seems like such a hard transition from where we’ve been already in the book. He says this,

“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.”

He’s giving this warning against false teachers. For time’s sake, I’m going to briefly go through what he’s saying. He’s pointing out that there are these guys who are coming into the church and they are saying, “Okay, you believe in Jesus, and that’s great. You have faith in Jesus and that’s great. But, you still need to be circumcised.” These Jewish believers were most likely Judaizers. Paul had dealt with them in a few different letters. But here, it seems like they are coming into the Church and putting this burden on people to say, “It’s great that all you Gentiles now believe in Jesus, but you need to be circumcised. You need to follow these rituals. You need to partake in these ceremonies.” What they are doing is putting the old covenant on top of believing in Jesus. They are burdening them down with this. And Paul is saying, “Beware of dogs.” That’s a biting statement for Paul to say. This is huge. Don’t think of a pet dog here. We have a dog, now, and it was so awesome when it was a puppy. Now, I’m looking forward to when it’s about ten and not moving again. But, don’t think about your pet. This is a very intentional, biting statement. Paul is using irony, because, for the Jew, they would refer to Gentiles as “dogs.” Maybe it would be better for us to think of the term “rat.” Because, for them, a dog was unclean. These mangy animals were diseased and lived on the street and they would eat anything to survive. For the Jew, who had very strong rituals about what it meant to be clean, and had dietary laws, they would look down on Gentiles and think they were so unclean. They were dirty like a dog that roamed the streets and ate whatever it could find. Gentiles were like a dog that turned and ate its own waste. That’s how they viewed Gentiles. That’s the lens that they would speak of them through.

So, when Paul says this, he is saying they are the dogs—these people who would come in and add to the Gospel. These people who would pervert the Gospel, they’re the dogs. They are evildoers. Because anyone who adds anything to grace nullifies grace, and that is the ultimate evil. The ultimate evil is to do anything that would draw somebody’s focus and attention away from the person and the work of Jesus—the all-sufficient life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. To subvert somebody’s attention and to get somebody’s attention off of Jesus is evil. To put it back on themselves, and their work, and their righteousness, is evil.

Then, Paul says they are mutilators of the flesh. Again, using irony, he says these dogs want them to be circumcised. For the Jews, calling these people slicers and dicers would have pointed them back to ancient, pagan religions, where people would cut themselves to try to gain the affection and attention of some pagan god. There were pagan rituals where they cut into their flesh, and by their bleeding and their scars they were somehow appealing to a god, to get the god to then do what they wanted him to do. Paul says that is what they are doing and that’s what they’ve gone back to. Because true Judaism, real Judaism, leads to Jesus. It finds its fulfillment not in obeying the laws for righteousness; not in sacrificing animals for forgiveness—those things were, in true Judaism, vehicles and vessels to bring us to the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. His blood was shed—“nothing but the blood of Jesus.” Paul says, “Beware of people who would come in and tell you that you have to do this in order to be a good Christian.”

I’d say that, for us, beware of anything, any teaching, any blog, any video, any thought that would come up in your own mind as you wrestle with Scripture, anything that would take your attention off of the finished, complete work of Jesus for your right standing with God and for your acceptance with God. You are an object of His divine eternal love and anything that you would put any confidence in other than Jesus—beware. That’s been a danger throughout human history. For the Jews, they turned into not a bunch of things that would prepare my heart and mind for the Messiah, but a bunch of things that I could do to get God on my side. If we are not careful we will treat the Gospel the same way; as if we are religious enough and we jump through the right hoops, and believe the right thing, say the right thing, give the right amount, show up, read the right version—if we do all those things, it’s not even so much that then I’ll be pleasing to God as much as it is that then I have God where I want Him.

That’s why self-righteousness and bad religion is so evil. That’s why God hates it. That’s why He refers to our righteousness as filthy rags. Why does He use such strong language? It’s supposed to be offensive. Right? A lot of us know that in that passage in Isaiah, when God refers to our righteousness, our good deeds, our keeping of the Law, our trying to be good enough on our own as “filthy rags,” that term means menstrual cloths. That’s offensive. It’s supposed to be. God wants us to feel offended when we hear that because He wants us to have a glimpse of what it’s like when we try to earn His love or His approval on our own. Because we can’t do it. What that really becomes is we say, “Okay, I know that what you say you desire is a broken and a contrite heart, and you desire for me to be broken over my sin, but instead I’m going to trust in my goodness. I think I’m good enough. I think I’m righteous.” As if that would somehow put God in my debt so that He would give me salvation and that He would give me blessings in this life. That’s why religion is so dangerous, and so bad, and so offensive to God; because it gives me the glory—and I’m not made for that. I’m not worthy of that. There is only One who is worthy of glory and honor.

So, then, Paul launches into his testimony. He says,

“For we are the circumcision.”

The real circumcision. He’s referring back to Deuteronomy 30:6.

“And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”

Paul would say in Romans 2 that real circumcision is circumcision of the heart. His point is that it is not about a physical sign; it’s about the work that God does inside of us. He says that we are the real circumcision…

“…who worship by the Spirit of God and glory (or boast) in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—.”

I have no confidence in my ability to be good enough. I have no confidence in my religious deeds or my piety. My confidence is solely in the person and the work of Jesus.

Then, Paul goes into his testimony and I will say this briefly. He says,

“Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day,…”

That was Law. That was good. God told the Jews to be circumcised on the eighth day. Circumcise your sons. What Paul is saying is, “I have confidence because my parents were faithful. I came from the right kind of family. My parents circumcised me when I was supposed to be circumcised. I came into this covenant in a right way.”

“…of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin,…”

Paul said that he was from the chosen people, but even of the chosen people he was from the right tribe; the tribe that was more faithful than the others. It was the tribe that the first king, who Saul was named after and came from. He’s from Benjamin. Then he says,

“…a Hebrew of Hebrews...”

It seems like what he is saying is that he could speak Hebrew. He could speak Aramaic. He hadn’t been so influenced by the culture that he lost his Hebrew roots.

“…as to the law, a Pharisee…”

So, within the tribe of tribes he was a part of the sect, the group of people who not only obeyed the Law but they added a bunch more laws so they didn’t even get close to breaking those first laws. Paul said, “I’m a Pharisee to the point of being so zealous that I persecuted the Church. I was so much a Pharisee—I was so much a good Jew—I was so self-righteous that I hated Jesus, because Jesus is an offense. Jesus says that my righteousness isn’t good enough and I needed His. I hated that. I saw Him as a heretic so I persecuted the Church.”

That’s what Paul was doing, right? On the road to Damascus, Paul was on his way to persecute Christians for preaching that you could be saved by grace through faith; not of yourself but that it was a gift of God. God would give you salvation and you could have perfect righteousness; not that you earned, but it was given to you by the life of Jesus. And Paul wanted to stop it. That’s how passionate he was; that he would dedicate his life to snuffing out Christianity.

“…as to righteousness under the law, blameless.”

Blameless. What’s he saying? No one could point to Paul’s life, or anything in his life, and say, “Man, that’s wrong. That’s sinful.” They couldn’t do it. So, like I said, Paul and I have different starting points.

I was making promises every Friday night, “If you get me out of here alive and get me home—I don’t even know where I am—If you will get me home I will never do this again.” Then, the next Friday night, “If you get me out of here—I don’t even know where I am—If you will get me home I will never do this again.” I couldn’t do it. But Paul was killing it. He was so disciplined and on the outside he seemed so godly, but this is what God hates. This is why false religion and cults set up everything around pure living and get your attention off of the real person of Jesus. They don’t want you to see Jesus as God. They don’t want you to see Jesus as enough. They put Him over on the side somewhere and what you have to do is be good enough. You have to work hard enough. And God hates that. It’s an offense to Him because He’s done everything.

Paul says,

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.”

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the gain of Christ.” All of these things we just listed off were credits in Paul’s account and he was spiritually rich, and God owed him salvation, and blessing, and favor, and prestige. So, when he would come into a town people would say, “There goes Saul, a Pharisee.” But Paul said, “But, when I met Jesus!!”

While Paul’s starting point is so different, we both ended up in the same place, on our faces before the holiness of God. Whether you are a Pharisee of Pharisees, or whether you’re an addict and you’ve done nothing but live a life of sin, it doesn’t matter. When you come face-to-face with the holiness of God we all fall short. None of us are righteous, no not one. Our righteousness is like filthy rags before God. All of us deserve His wrath and His judgment. But the power, and the glory, and the beauty of Jesus, who stands perfectly righteous, tempted in every way as we are yet without sin—our Jesus, our God, in humbling himself to become one of us would reach down, whether it’s into your shame and your guilt or into your disgusting self-righteousness that ultimately leads to despair—in either case He would reach down into it to take you by the hand and breathe life into your lungs, and make your heart beat for real for the first time. He would open your eyes for the first time so that you could see that Jesus is God, and Jesus is enough, and Jesus is worthy, and all of this has ultimately always been about Jesus. I had been deceived but God would make me alive and God would give me vision. Paul said, “Whatever gain I had—whatever I was holding onto and thought I had God by the tail—I count that as loss.” For what? To gain Christ. To know Christ.

You are saying that I can know this God? This holy God? This God who dwells in inapproachable light? I can know Him and have a relationship with Him? Remember Moses when he was on the mountain getting the Law? He was praying for the people. They had just sinned horribly and God had been gracious. God was talking to Moses face-to-face and Moses said, “God, will you show me your glory?” And God said, “I can’t do that. If I show you my face you’ll die. You can’t see that. But what I will do is I’ll put you in the rock and I’ll cover you up and as I pass by I will declare my name to you—‘Yahweh’— A God merciful and full of lovingkindness. I will show mercy and grace. I’m faithful. I forgive iniquities.” God tells Moses who He is.

Then, John tells us in his gospel, “That’s Jesus! That’s Jesus! We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The Law came through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus. We’ve seen it. We’ve seen the unapproachable glory.

If you are a Christian—if you are a believer—listen to me. You’ve seen it. This is why you’re a believer. This is why you’re a Christian. Because you have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus. You were drawn to Him and you quit trusting in your own works. You quit holding on to sinful desires. You let go of it. Whatever thing in your life you counted as gain, you let go of it, and you hate it, and you count it as rubbish for the sake of knowing Jesus, because there is nothing more valuable. Listen to what Paul says,

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish…”

Literally, “I count them as dung.” Whatever it was, Paul says, “I count it as loss.” All things. Every thing. There is nothing in this life more valuable than the knowledge of Jesus because I get to know Him. I get to know Him.

That night, for me, was the game changer. I remember walking outside and seeing the moon, and the moon was no longer this thing that reflected light. For me, the moon was this thing that almighty God spoke into existence and upheld by the power of His word. It became crystal clear to me that that God, the unknowable God, the unapproachable God—that God had approached me to make himself known to me and I could live my life knowing Him more and more. That’s what Paul says, “I let go of everything so that I could pursue a deeper, ongoing knowledge of God.”

The word for “knowledge” here is a relationship word. It’s family knowledge. It’s marital knowledge. It’s intimate. That means I get to know who the person of God is, through Jesus. I get to spend time with Him and He talks to me through His Word. I speak to Him in prayer. He shows me His will for my life and He shows me what’s available to me and what I need to pursue more than anything is not to go back to self-righteousness, not to get comfortable with my sin again, but that I would strive forward, and to never, ever feel comfortable in knowing Him enough, but that I would dive deeper into my knowledge of Him, and that I would see that what I have available to me day-in and day-out, is the power of His resurrection. So that I would see that God’s power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to me for how I would treat my wife, for how I would raise my kids, for how I witness to strangers, for how I share the Gospel with my neighbors, for how I handle my money, how I handle adversity and trials, and for how I deal with suffering and persecution. Because all of it—all of the trials and all of the sufferings in this life—Paul is saying in this passage, “Oh, that I would know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship to share in and to participate in sufferings that lead me into a deeper knowledge of Jesus; because Jesus is there in the suffering with me. He is with me in the trials. Just like He identified with me in my sin, and my guilt, and my shame, and my self-righteousness so that God would be just and the Justifier, because He would see Jesus as guilty of my sin because He identified me with Him; God identified me with Jesus so that He could punish Him in my place. Just like that, now I get to be identified with Him in His resurrection.

Listen to this in verse 8,

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

“My Lord.” I love that. Paul doesn’t often say that, but he says, “My Lord.” It’s personal. It’s testimony time and it’s personal. Jesus is rescuing His Church and tonight we are going to celebrate that it’s also very personal and individual. We are going to see three eternal souls from this body and from this community who have gone from death to life. What they are going to do through baptism is identify with Him by saying, “This is what happened to me. I am found in Jesus. I’m not found in my own righteousness and I’m not found in my own works.” But Alani, and Molly, and Jesse are found in Jesus. Because of that, they have His righteousness, and that can’t be taken away. Tell me there is something better than that and I’ll preach that—but there is not! This is the Gospel. This is the Good News. We don’t earn righteousness and we don’t earn favor—it’s given to us by God. Jesus earned it and He gives it to you. You are in Him. You are in Him.

“Being found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”

That’s called justification. It’s beautiful. Justification means that in the courtroom of God, as if God were a judge and we were on trial—it’s not only that we are found forgiven—it’s not that picture. We have forgiveness. He’s forgiven us of our personal offense against His nature but this means that when God looks at us, because Jesus identified with us in our sin, and our guilt, and our shame—now we identify with Jesus in His righteousness, so when God the Father looks at you all He sees is Jesus and Jesus’ righteousness. So, what God says about you is, “Not guilty. Adam is not guilty; he’s righteous. He always obeyed Me—to the point of death, even death on a cross.” We are identified with Jesus in His death on the cross. The ultimate point of Him taking away our guilt but also, the climax is of Jesus being obedient. You are identified with that. That’s how God sees you. Nothing could ever change that.

“But that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

Our justification is secure; we have it by faith. You’ve been declared righteous.

Kids, I had great intentions of not only using big words and I’m sorry. When we talk about having righteousness, it means that it is as if we have perfectly obeyed Jesus all the time. It’s like you’ve been perfect and that you never sinned and that you always obeyed. It’s like you always did what God told you to do and you never did what He told you not to do. None of us has really done that, but God, gave us grace because Jesus did it. He became a real human baby, right? He lived His life perfectly and He never sinned. He earned righteousness. So, when through faith we trust that Jesus is God, and that He died and rose again—what God gives us as a gift is the righteousness of Jesus—His perfection. We have it.

Then, Paul says, it’s not just that, but now we get to have fellowship in His sufferings. It’s not that we suffer and that somehow adds to the work of salvation—that work is finished. Jesus said it, “It is finished.” Jesus did all the work and the heavy lifting. But now, as we identify with Him in this world, and as we follow Jesus, we are going to suffer. That’s wide open. For Paul, when he wrote this, he was suffering in prison. He was in prison for the Gospel and, at times, that’s what it’s going to look like for believers—persecution for proclaiming the Gospel. It might be imprisonment; it might be economic; it might be social pressure; it might be the loss of family or friends, but there will some sort of persecution and some sort of suffering. At times, for you, suffering for Jesus might look like when your parents die, or when cancer strikes, or when your child dies, or when you lose your job. For the believer, whatever suffering we go through, we are in fellowship with Jesus in the midst of that suffering because He has suffered like no one else. He knows suffering and He is victorious through suffering, and we identify with Him in that. We get to walk in that with Him, knowing that there is eternal purpose. For the believer, there is always purpose in our suffering. We can be victorious and faithful in suffering. We can follow Jesus no matter how bad or difficult life gets because—remember we have the power of His resurrection.

This is not Paul saying, “I want to know the power of His resurrection and then later on I want to know the fellowship of His suffering.” These two things go together. Paul wants to know the power of the resurrected Jesus in all of life’s suffering, because in that you will grow in your fellowship with Jesus. You will share in those experiences with Jesus and that knowledge of God will grow because you will experience Jesus through your sufferings more clearly than you will through your comfort. You will experience Jesus’ faithfulness in your life through the harder, more difficult, more painful seasons than you will when everything is going smoothly, because you will join in the fellowship of His suffering.

“Becoming like him in his death.”

Jesus died to sin. He died to temptation. He died to this world. And for us, our sanctification—our progressively becoming more and more like Jesus, and here the idea that we are being conformed to Jesus in His death—is that as we follow Jesus, and the power of His resurrection is on display in our life, do you know what we will die to? Sin. We will put sin to death. We will die to it and we will lay it in the grave just like Jesus did. Jesus laid it in the grave and it stayed there.

In just a few minutes we are going to see it. We are going to watch these three young believers go into the water and the picture is that they died with Jesus. His death was their death. They are identified with Jesus and they belong to Jesus. They are in Jesus, unified with Jesus, and one with Jesus. So, when He died to sin they died to it. And just like Jesus rose again, sin did not rise with Him. He killed it. He killed that sin and left sin in the grave. He rose again and do you know who He brought with Him? Us. We are united with Him. These kids rose with Jesus. They are united with Him to walk in a new kind of life because they have His righteousness. They didn’t earn it. They don’t have to try to please God in the sense of earning His forgiveness and love. They have it, so now they are free, so in no matter what situation they go through they are going to walk by the power of that resurrection. They are going to be faithful. They will fall and mess up, sure. Will they stay in their shame? No. God’s grace is bigger than guilt and it’s bigger than shame. They are going to walk in the victory of Christ’s resurrection.

“So that by any means possible I might attain the resurrection of the dead.”

I want to be conformed to this. I want to die to sin in my own life. Positionally, I have it. Eternally, sin doesn’t have a hold on me. I’m separated from it. In this flesh, in this body, in the meantime, I am going to battle sin. As I pursue a knowledge of Christ and see His power on display in my life, that’s going to be put to death. We need to pursue it. In the next chapter, next week, you are going to see that Paul is serious about not just being comfortable in the position he has with Christ and the declaration that’s been made. He works hard. We’ve gotta work hard, so that by any means possible we might attain to the resurrection.

It seems like he’s saying that he’s not confident that he will be raised on the last day. In the language that he’s using, it’s not the picture of baptism anymore. He’s sure that Christ is going to return on the last day. The dead will rise and be with Jesus. The end goal and end game is that I’m resurrected and given a glorified body to be with Jesus. Paul makes it almost sound like, “Boy, I hope I make it.” But we know that’s not the case, because Paul is always saying—look over to the end of this chapter, in verses 20-21. I’ll read this briefly. He says this,

“But our citizenship is in Heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to himself.”

Paul is confident. He’s confident. He is confident of the resurrection that awaits him. We know this from Romans 8 and so many other passages. So what is this? It’s humility. This is Paul’s humility where he knows that we are not there yet. We have it; it’s ours in Christ but we are not there yet, so there’s work to do. There is sin to be put to death. Not to earn my righteousness but to live out what it means to suffer with Jesus. To live out the Gospel in a real way I have to put sin to death and pursue Jesus, and pursue that which He has already worked in me. I need to pursue that which He has promised I have for all of eternity. In this, Jesus gets the glory. There’s no boasting. There’s no boasting in me. There’s no boasting in, “Look at this sin I used to commit. Look at how I pulled myself up and got out of that. Look how different I am.” There’s no boasting in that. There’s no boasting in, “I was a pretty good dude. I was religious. I was part of this religion or this church. We didn’t really bend the rules that much.” There is none of that. There is no boasting in that. There is only boasting in the glory of Jesus, and His goodness, and His perfection, and His love, and His humility, and His victory.

Pray with me.

Lord God, we love you. God, I pray that you would continue to reveal yourself to us through your Word, through song, and through the baptisms that we are going to watch. I pray that you would be glorified. God, thank you for loving us. Thank you that you would lay down your life to give us life, and that your death could be our death, and that your resurrection could be ours. I pray, God, that we would be humbled as we watch these kids go into the water. I pray that you would draw grownups to repentance and faith by seeing the Gospel on display in these baptisms and that we would see people cry out to you for salvation tonight, and that they would go from death to life and give you the glory. We love you and we need you. In Christ’s name.

October 9, 2016

Philippians 3:12-21

Brody Holloway

We believe that the most biblical way to handle the Word of God is through what’s called expository teaching. If you are a member here and you’ve been through our membership course, you’ve seen that one of the distinctives of this church is the way we handle Scripture. We take the text, we study and examine what the text is saying, we take the main point of the text and we make that the main point of the sermon, and that opens the door for discussion in discipleship groups. It also gives an opportunity in your personal study throughout the week to be studying through the text that we are going to be going through on Sunday.

Here’s the beauty in this, just practically. We are going through the book of Philippians right now, so over a period of about three or four months we are going through the book of Philippians. As we come in on Sunday night, what you get is sort of an aerial view of a passage. So, the pastor or teacher who has prepared for Sunday is going to give you an aerial view. We are not typically going to get to go very deep because we are taking larger chunks of Scripture than what we would prefer to teach. For instance, the text we are covering tonight, in most commentaries is spread out into two to four sermons and we are doing it in one. So, it’s an overview of the text, but then on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, in discipleship groups, we peel back a few more layers and get a little deeper and more practical. But then, you have the opportunity from Monday to the next Sunday to study the text that we are going to be in on Sunday. So, every direction that you come at this from, we are in the Word of God and it provides a cohesiveness and a likemindedness within the church body. It’s really practical. It’s super practical. You don’t show up at church on Sunday and go, “Well, we are going to hear a sermon. There will be three points that will be alliterated. I’m sure there will be some entertaining discussion and illustrations that will be great. I wonder what it will be?” You can prepare your heart to receive the Word of God and then you can leave from here and follow up in your own study from notes you took and the text that was covered on that Sunday night.

So, as we go through books of the Bible there is a lot of cohesion and a lot of unity in the way that we study the Word of God together. Everybody is sort of in the same place. What we are trying to do in the way that we teach through the Bible is to actually teach our people how to study the Bible. We go through a book of the Bible verse by verse and if you are paying attention it teaches you how to study the Bible. When you leave here you can spend the next few days working through that text and you will be studying the Bible the same way it is being preached, and that is expositionally. You are hearing it expositionally, we are preaching it expositionally, and you are studying it expositionally. There is a lot of unity in that.

So, with that being said, we will turn to Philippians 3:12. Again, what we are getting here is sort of a flyover view. We could take any of these texts we have studied and we could really go deep and go in a lot of different directions. There is so much that is covered in any one text. What we are going to do is an overview of it and we are going to break it down tonight into five main things that we are going to talk about. But I’ll start by reading the text, beginning in Philippians 3:12. This is the Word of the Lord.

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

So, let’s stop right there. We will look at the first three things. What we are going to talk about is five challenges for growth and maturity in the life of the believer. So, in this text we will consider five challenges for growth and maturity in the life of a believer.

Oftentimes, in the Christian walk, people will fall into one of two extremes. Most of us have probably been in either of these extremes—some of us in both. I know that I’ve been in both. One of those extremes is that we take too much responsibility onto ourselves for our Christian walk, where we say, “I have to follow the rules properly. I have to get everything right. I can’t mess up. If I mess up, I’ve failed God, and that means I’m a failure as a Christian.” We sort of beat ourselves up and we live a defeated mindset. “If I don’t follow all the rules then I’ve let the Church down, and I’ve let God down, and I’ve let my family down, so my faith must not be real.” Or, we fall into this other extreme where we go, “Here’s all the rules. I will adhere to them and anyone else who doesn’t adhere to them is not as good a Christian as I am.” That’s called legalism.

So, one of the extremes that Christians tend to run to is to establish this really, really big works-based idea of what the Christian life looks like, and that’s just not biblical. The other extreme would be to sort of say that God is the one who saved me, God is the one who is working in me, God is the one who is going to complete the work in me, so why do I even bother trying. That’s an old teaching called quietism, which is basically that I just be quiet and surrender to Jesus and He will do everything. I don’t really have to do anything. But we know that is not biblical either, because the Scripture, even in this letter, tells us to work out our salvation. We are to work and to labor.

Oftentimes, in Scripture, you will see, like in our text tonight, a progressive terminology. Like, as a Christian, you have to strain, you’ve got to work, you’ve got to drive, and dig, and work hard to pursue the Lord, because we live in a world that’s conflicted and it’s not easy to just kick back and be a Christian. It just doesn’t come to you. It is not like you can hit cruise control and kind of cruise through the Christian life and know that God’s going to do all the work so you don’t have to do anything. God does all the work of saving us; God does all the work of making us righteous; God does all the work of restoring an eternal home for us—but we have a task put in front of us, and that is to put our hand to the plow and labor in the Christian walk that God has called us to. That’s what Paul is talking about here.

We are laboring not to earn God’s favor. I think one of the things that’s really important for us as Christians is to understand the difference between earning and effort. We don’t earn anything but we are called to put forth one hundred percent effort as Christians—to give of our lives one hundred percent all the time. To walk with the Lord is a demanding thing. This means it’s going to permeate our Christian walk in the home, and at work, and at church, and to the world. Who I am is defined by Jesus and by my Christianity.

The first of these five challenges for growth and maturity is laid out in these three verses, verses 12-14, and the first one is this. I have to humbly acknowledge that I have not yet arrived. Maybe you’ve been around a super-Christian and when you are around that person you feel like a half-Christian. You think, “This guy seems to have it all together,” or “This girl is the perfect mom. Her house is always clean and she sings songs to Jesus as she goes about her day. Her kids are perfect. Nobody makes a mistake. They are absolutely the perfect family. I will never be like them.” Well, maybe you will and maybe you won’t, but you aren’t trying to be like them right now. You are trying to be like Jesus and you have not yet arrived. So, if you a mom and you have a screaming three year old, a screaming two year old, a screaming one year old, and a screaming forty year old husband, it’s okay—you haven’t yet arrived and neither have either of them. This life is fairly chaotic and will continue to be.

Zach and I were talking yesterday and I said, “I have a theory. Those Puritans that we like to read were pretty religious. They were pretty holy and focused. But, in the wintertime, it didn’t get daylight until 7am and it was dark at 5pm. They had a lot of time on their hands with no internet, no TV, and no automobiles. I don’t think they were that righteous, I think they were just really bored. So, they just read their Bibles.” As much as I was joking in saying that, the reality is that we have a lot of distractions. There are things that are constantly taking our focus off of life. We live in a very distracting world and it’s hard to stay focused, and the thing that we need to understand first, in understanding the challenge that we have for growth and maturity, is that we are not at a point where we can hit cruise control and let our Christianity be on auto-pilot. You have not arrived at perfection. You just haven’t. You haven’t gotten there nor will you get there in this life.

Now, what you have arrived at is the doctrine of justification, which we know comes by faith. Justification by faith is the point where, as a non-believing person, as a person who doesn’t know Jesus, love Jesus, or walk with Jesus, God brings you from death to life and you receive the gift of salvation. The power of the Gospel changes you. This is the doctrine that we have to hold to with white knuckles and believe with all of our hearts and be willing to die for; that God saves people by justifying them, by making them righteous by the work and merit of Jesus, not on our own works and our own merit. So, you are a Christian because of the work of Jesus, and watch this—you haven’t arrived, but Jesus has arrived. In fact, He started there and He’s never left there. He’s perfect, eternal, and sinless. He left the throne of Heaven and became one of us so that He could conquer the things that conquer us every day. But, our arrival depends on Christ’s arrival, and He’s never been not-arrived. He’s never faltered. He’s never messed up. So, when we rest in the work of Jesus we are resting in our justification or our salvation.

So, as a Christian, when I look back at the past of my life, what I should see—this is beautiful—what I should see is a big wall. I can’t see past that wall and graffitied across that wall are the words, “Justification by Faith.” What was on the other side of that wall? Who cares? The blood of Jesus has cleansed you from unrighteousness. A lot of you live in self-deprecating guilt, and you live in remorse because of past sin, and you let what you did back there before you met Jesus control your joy, and that should not be the case, and you should stop it. The doctrine of justification by faith is what gives us what we need to go forward knowing that we are forgiven. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that God takes us, who are sinful, and He takes Jesus, who is righteousness, and He swaps the two. God says, “I’m going to give you the righteousness of Jesus and Jesus, at the cross, is going to take your sin.” You don’t earn that. You don’t dig yourself out of that hole. You don’t get yourself out of the grave. Spurgeon painted the picture of dead people on the bottom of the ocean, face down, having drowned, and laying there dead in sin. They aren’t drowning victims who are reaching for a life-preserver that’s been thrown to them, but they are dead people, on the bottom of the ocean, who need to be brought out, and brought to life, and resuscitated. We were dead in sin, and what God does is He justifies us on the basis, and the work, and the merit of Jesus.

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

We have not arrived but we’ve started. And He who began that work in us is going to be faithful to complete it. If you are a Christian, praise God and Amen, you are not defined by who you were before you met Jesus. I’ve heard a lot of your testimonies. Y’all are some screwed up people. We are a bunch of messed up people, man. But for the grace of God and the power of the Gospel we are no longer those things that we were. We are no longer defined by our addictions or by our past philosophies and vanities. We are no longer defined by divorce, or addiction, or sexuality. You don’t take a thing and tag it to your name and say you are that person. The only word that describes you as a Christian is the righteousness of Jesus. That’s who you are. You are not defined by where you’ve been or what you’ve done. You are defined by who Jesus is. So, the first thing we have to understand is that we have not arrived. We see that in verses 12-13, specifically in the first part of each of those verses. Paul says, “I’ve not already obtained. I’m not already perfect.” In verse 13, he says, “I don’t consider that I’ve made it my own.”

Now, this leads us to the second challenge for growth and maturity. We have to be careful here because what people can very easily do is say, “The first thing is true—I have not yet arrived,” then if we are not careful we can make that an excuse for sloppy, lazy Christian living. We can say, “Well, I’m not perfect. Jesus forgave me. Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven, so I’m going to screw up a lot, but that’s okay because in the end I’ll get into Heaven because Jesus saved me.” That is not the doctrine of the Christian life that we see laid out in Scripture.

So, number two is this. The number two challenge for growth and maturity in the Christian life is to passionately pursue a greater knowledge of Christ. Here is how I sort of define my works as a person. I’m not working to earn God’s favor and I’m not working for my own righteousness—what I’m working to do is to know Christ better—to pursue Christ and pursue a deeper knowledge of the Lord, and to know Him more fully and to know Him more clearly. Paul uses this terminology in verse 13,

“But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead…”

He uses these two words—“forget” and “reach.” Forget what is back there and reach for what’s up here. So, we look back and we see that wall that’s blocking all that we used to be. You are not defined by what’s on the other side of that wall. Even as a Christian, after that happened you have had major failures in your life, and every time you mess up God just goes ‘boom’ and He puts that wall up and when you look back you see the justification of Christ that’s been given to you. So, as a Christian I am looking forward and straining forward and it’s important not to look back.

I was never a runner. I was in the Royal Ambassadors Haywood County track meet three years in a row, in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. I won fourth place in the softball throw. I was really proud of that. They give green ribbons if you’re really bad at something but they want you to think you’re really good at it. So, I tossed that softball and I was really proud of that. You can imagine what kind of track meet it was. There were a bunch of country churches with a bunch of white country boys out there doing a track meet. It was a pretty slow affair. But, I remember we didn’t have a coach, we just had our RA teacher – RA stands for Royal Ambassadors, which is in the Southern Baptist Church. It’s like a Christian version of Boy Scouts that meets at church. Some denomination has Royal Rangers and one has Royal Ambassadors. Some of you might have grown up in AWANA. But, I remember that we had this track meet and the leader told us, “Just start running. Don’t look back.” That was easy for me because I was in last place. I didn’t have to look back because I could see everybody in front of me. But, I can imagine that if you are the guy in the front that looking back would disrupt your stride. It’s that picture that Paul is painting. Don’t look back but strive ahead. Don’t look back to the things that have tripped you up or messed you up, but also don’t look back to the things that you did right. There is enough in front of us to pursue.

I’ll tell you, man. This past Wednesday night we had new members who met in our home. We are doing a four-week new members cycle. I will tell you this—there have been some times in my life when I can say that we really met together and met with the Lord. This past Wednesday night I went to bed with my heart so full of joy. There were probably twelve or fourteen of us and over half the people in there were saying, “I was addicted to drugs,” or “I was addicted to alcohol,” and “I did this” or “I did that.” “I lived this life but then I met Jesus.” I was so full of joy that night being reminded of the power of the Gospel to change people’s lives and to take people from death to life. But what I have to do now is not look back to what I was but look forward to what Jesus is going to ultimately make me, which is just like Him. There is that doctrine of justification, but what we are in right now, in this season of life, is that we are in the middle of another doctrine called sanctification.

If you not a Christian or if you are a new Christian and you’ve never heard these words, sanctification is the teaching that all throughout your life as a Christian that you are constantly becoming more and more like Jesus. Jesus is doing the work in you through your desires, through your work, and through your efforts, and you are obeying, and He is doing the work in you, but you have responsibility to obey, and follow Jesus, and read His Word, and love people well, and worship God faithfully. That’s called sanctification—becoming more like Jesus every day of my life. That should be true for us believers.

So, if you’re not a believer, you need to be justified—made righteous in Jesus. Jesus offers that to you. If you are a Christian, what He is doing is He is making you more like Jesus throughout the course of your life. It’s a really powerful work that Jesus does in us. So, I am forgetting my past failures but I’m also forgetting my past achievements.

Listen—one of the most annoying things is to be around someone who talks about their past achievements all the time. Don’t be that guy and don’t be that gal. It could be like talking about how good you were in baseball in Junior High. Or it could be how much money you made at your last job. Or it could be how many businesses you’ve started, or this, or that. Past achievements hopefully built momentum for us, to get us to where we are now, but there’s too much in front of us to worry about what’s gone on back there. I think that a lot of times we read a text like this and we go, “Okay, I need to not look back at the bad stuff, but every once and a while I need to look back at the good stuff. That makes me feel good about myself.” No, don’t feel good about yourself. Feel good about Jesus—and to do that you have to look forward. To do that you have to strive, and labor, and reach, and strain.

One of the commentators who we are using in this series is a guy named Peter O’Brien. He says this,

“Paul will not allow either the achievements of the past or, for that matter, his failures as a Christian, to prevent his gaze from being fixed firmly on the finish line. In this sense, he forgets as he runs.”

I always tend to go with sports analogies. Some of you do that. Every year in March there is this thing called March Madness. There is always a big deal about the Cinderella teams that upset. They are teams that shouldn’t win but they do, and they beat better teams, which is always interesting because doesn’t that mean they are the better team? Right? Not necessarily. They could be a less talented team but they put it together, they work hard, and they win. But every time they interview a coach or a player after a big win here is what they will say, “We’ve got to get ready for the next game.” They are already saying, “We’ve celebrated. We’ve raised our fists. We are excited but now there’s work to do because we have another opponent that’s waiting for us and they are going to be coming after us.” The Christian life is like that. When God does something great in your life and you have a great victory, and you feel excited about something where God does something where you can clearly see the hand of the Lord in your life, you need to raise your fist in thanksgiving and worship and praise. “Thank you, Jesus, for what you’ve done.” Rejoice in the Lord for what He’s done but then you better get that hand down and put it back on the plow because the enemy is lurking. Right after great moments and seasons of victory, that’s when he’s going to throat punch you. That’s when he’s going to break your proverbial spiritual nose with a two-by-four. While you are doing this and praising the Lord over what He’s just done—rejoice, get some momentum, and get right back at it, because the enemy is going to come right after you.

So, Paul says I have to forget past achievements and I have to forget past failures. Those things have helped to define who I am right now, and they’re under the work of Jesus, and I’ve got to keep striving for what’s in front of me. I’ve got to work to get to where I’m going. One thing I do is I press on, I fight, I endure, and I pursue. These are aggressive words. Listen to the words Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 9:24,

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”

Paul is aggressive in the way that he approaches the Christian life. He’s saying, “Look, you’ve got to work hard. This is not going to be easy.” A lot of times he uses these athletic or sports analogies, but sometimes he will use a fighting analogy, or a running analogy. I’m going to tell you something, there are two things that exhaust me to think about; one is running and the other is boxing. Watch people train for those things at a high, elite level. For those of you who have the study guide that we are using in discipleship groups, he talks about a guy who was the United States’s marathon guy in the Rio Olympics. His first name is Meb[[86]](#footnote-86) and I can’t pronounce his last name. He is from somewhere, I think, in the horn of Africa, but he’s been in America for most of his life. He’s an incredible runner.

So, after the bombing happened at the Boston Marathon, at that terrible terrorist attack, the next year this guy, Meb, went out as something like a 39 year old dude, and won the Boston Marathon. It was the first time an American had won it in something like 30 years and it was the first time a dude that old had won it in 80 years. And as he ran across the finish line people were yelling, “USA, USA, USA!!” Americans hadn’t won it in so long because we are slow and fat. All those little guys from overseas are like greased lightning. They usually run laps around our people. But not Meb. Meb stroked it that day. He throttled everybody. I watched it on YouTube[[87]](#footnote-87) and there was so much emotion. He was weeping and his brother came down, who was definitely not a marathon runner, and they were hugging, and fist-pumping, and he was saying, “This is so sweet because one year ago today the terrorist attack happened.” There’s so much emotion already in running that race. It’s a big deal to just finish a marathon. To win one of that magnitude is huge, but to do it on the one-year anniversary of such a monumental event, there was so much emotion.

So, I think that Paul has the Greek Olympic Games, and the Roman games, and the gladiatorial arena, so he has these visual pictures of a Christian crossing the finish line. Listen church, can you picture this as a husband? Quit being selfish. Can you picture this as a daddy? It isn’t about how much money you make. Picture this as a mother. Your children are a gift from the Lord. Can you picture this as a business owner, as an employee, as a neighbor, or as a friend? Can you just picture that we are in this race and we are striving, and praying, and we are fighting against our own flesh, and we are fighting against the temptation of this world. What God has promised us is an ultimate prize, whereby, one day, He will raise our hand and He will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You finished the race and you fought the fight. Enter into a kingdom that I have prepared for you and I promise you it will be worth it.” Whatever financial situation you are in right now, it will be worth it to fight through it. Whatever economic struggle you are having, it will be worth it to fight through it. Whatever addiction keeps clawing at you and keeps knocking on your door at midnight, it will be worth it to put a spiritual shotgun in its face and blow its head off. Again, whatever thing tries to trip you up, stumble you, or hinder you—fight, claw, scratch, reach forward, and grab hold of what God’s given you, and know that it’s going to be worth it in the end. We have not yet arrived, but we will one day arrive. God has called us to great things as sons and daughters of the Most High God.

So, we press on. Listen to Hebrews 12:1-2,

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Do you ever watch that show called *American Ninja Warrior*[[88]](#footnote-88)? We love to watch that when we are at my mom’s house. I don’t know if you’ve ever watched it but it’s really fascinating and they are incredible athletes. I always feel sorry for the first guy who goes. Typically he doesn’t do great. The further down the list you go, you are able to watch where those who have gone before you have messed up. You will hear the commentators say, “That’s not the way to step there.” Some dude just landed on his head, upside down, and everyone is laughing. They’ll say, “The next guy needs to be careful with that step.” So, by watching people go through and do it wrong, you can learn and do it right. See, we can learn from others failures, but we can learn from Christ’s perfection, and those things combined will give us a realistic look at what our lives can be.

If your dad walked out on you, you can learn from that. Lay over that the perfection of Christ and you can see what life is supposed to look like as a Christian. We have someone who has gone before us. Jesus conquered. He didn’t fall and He didn’t yield to sin. The things that you might struggle with, Jesus faced and conquered them, therefore, Christ in you will give you the ability to conquer those things. Jesus will strengthen you and give you what you need.

The first two things are humbly acknowledge that you haven’t arrived and passionately pursue a greater knowledge of Christ. The third challenge for growth and maturity in the Christian life is never lose the wonder of the Gospel. Never lose the wonder of the Gospel. How do we do this?

Ben and I were having a quick conversation downstairs and I said, “Man, I love fall!” We were sitting out in the yard today, chilling, and being lazy on a Sunday afternoon, and were just lounging around, and we noticed that up here on Robbinsville Mountain, at the cell towers, if you look up there the leaves are starting to really turn. You can see it around here a little bit but if you look up there they are starting to turn bronze. It’s getting ready to explode. In the next two to three weeks, it’s going to blow up around here. If you are new to the area and you have never been here in the fall, it’s getting ready to blow your mind. Every day that I walk outside—my phone is probably sick of me taking pictures from my front porch—it never gets old. I have people say to me, “I don’t know how you could ever get used to living here,” and I’m like, “You don’t. You don’t.” But I’m kind of weird because I’ll be driving through Indiana and be saying, “This corn is beautiful!” All of creation is beautiful to me because creation declares and displays the glory and the wonder of God. So, one of the ways that we can constantly be reminded is through creation.

But, another way is through relationships that God gives us. The way that you love people and the way that you receive love from people constantly reminds you of the wonder of the Gospel. We are also reminded through God’s Word. His Word is very important. Knowing His Word, reading His Word, loving His Word—I encourage you to get up in the morning and open God’s Word. Read it, but don’t just read a short passage. Dig into four, five, or six chapters. Read it aggressively. Read it out loud. If you are too tired to study in the morning, I get it. I can’t study in the morning. I get out of bed and walk down to the end of my driveway and back. That gets the blood flowing a little bit, then I get my coffee, and I sit down, and I just read about four, or five, or six chapters of the Bible. Half of it goes over my head because my brain isn’t awake all the way, Knoxy. My brain has to wake up. My brain likes to stay asleep longer than me. I’m saying that to Knox because her daddy is the same way. We talk about sitting on the edge of the couch and saying, “I know there’s some good stuff in here.” If you say you can’t study, just get up, and open God’s Word, and read it. God will speak to you. Before you go to bed, read it and God will speak to you. So, God’s Word gives us a constant reminder and brings us back to wonder and to the beauty of the Gospel.

So, in these five challenges for growth and maturity, number one is humbly acknowledge that you haven’t arrived. Number two, passionately pursue a greater knowledge of Christ. Number three, never lose the wonder of the Gospel. In verse 15, listen to what he says. I want to touch on verse 15 real quick. Paul says,

“Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.”

There is a lot of talk about knowing God’s will. Paul is touching on that here. Say you are in a place where you are going, “Okay, am I supposed to pursue this person in a relationship? Am I supposed to change jobs? Am I supposed to settle here or move somewhere else?” You come to places in your life where you are questioning and seeking God’s will—maybe it’s a business decision, maybe it’s a parenting decision, maybe it’s an educational decision, maybe it’s a dating decision. Here are three principles real quick from verse 15 that will help you know God’s will.

Number one, go in seeking God’s will in your life, because in the process of sanctification it’s going to be critical that you are constantly walking in God’s will. In seeking God’s will for your life, go in as a yes man or a yes woman. Don’t go in as a negotiator, like, “Let me negotiate with God the terms of His will for my life.” Go in saying, “God, wherever you say go, I’ll go. Whatever you say do, I’ll do. Whoever you say be with, I’ll be with.” Pursue God’s will that way. Start off by being a yes man or a yes woman.

Number two, God’s Word will never contradict His calling or His will for you. Listen, God’s Word will never contradict His calling or His will for you. So, if you feel this strong compulsion to do something that contradicts God’s Word, it’s not the will of God for you to do it and it’s not His Spirit leading you into that. Make sense? This is important because a lot of Christians will say, “I know that I probably ought not to do x, y, or z, but…it just feels right.” Right? But, you have to remember that you are not yet perfected, so sometimes things are going to feel right that are not right. Your answer should never be, “What’s the big deal about it?” Examine God’s Word daily in your life and He will give you clarity in decision making. When something contradicts God’s Word, that thing is not part of God’s will for your life.

God gives us grace. Some of you have made mistakes and made bad decisions. I’ll give you an example of where someone doesn’t follow God’s will but then God heaps grace on that person and in the end it works out. There are a lot of people in our church who are in their second and third marriages. Maybe you went into a relationship or a marriage where you were disobedient to what God’s will for your life would have been, but you defied the Lord and pursued that. But now, God has you at a place where you say, “God is so gracious to me. He’s brought me into this beautiful relationship with this person who loves me. We are honoring the Lord and pursing Him.” What is that? That’s God’s grace and that’s beautiful. It’s a beautiful thing. So, we can see God’s will more clearly in our lives as we are pursuing the knowledge of God through His Word.

The third thing concerning God’s will is this. If I can live in constant fellowship, literally hourly fellowship with the Lord, I am going to be more in tune with His will for my life. I’m going to have more clarity. So, as I’m going through life, and I’m not looking back, and I’m pressing forward, and living the Christian life, there are times that I have to make decisions. “Where do I go to college next year?” I don’t know, just pursue Jesus. Open His Word and He will give you clarity and He will work through your desires, and He will let His will be known to you.

The fourth challenge for growth and maturity is this. Follow good, Christlike examples. You will see that in verses 16-19,

“Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”

What you have attained is your salvation. So, hold true to it and remember who you are. “Hold firmly to the faith you profess,” is what Paul says in other places. He says to stand firmly in the Gospel you received. Don’t forget who you are and don’t forget whose you are. Verse 17,

“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.”

So, Paul says that to follow good, Christlike examples, there are two thoughts or principles here.

Number one, walk like those examples walk. So, learn from good, godly Christian examples. I talked to a guy yesterday who is a pastor. He was talking about how thankful he is for his wife and he said, “When I was thirteen years old, on a Saturday morning I got up and I walked into the kitchen and my mom had put this big spread out. There was gravy, biscuits, sausage, eggs, and I was so excited because my mom never cooked. I thought I had arrived.” He said, his mom set the table, everybody sat down to eat, and his mom walked in, took her apron off, and said, “I’m pregnant. I’m leaving. Goodbye.” The next time he saw her he was nineteen years old. She was pregnant with another man’s baby.

When something like that happens it messes you up. It disrupts your view of marriage. It disrupts your view of motherhood. But, what we know is that we can find good, godly examples and learn from them, but no examples are perfect. So, ultimately, Christ is our example, but finding examples in other people’s lives who are pursuing Jesus can be really helpful. If you are single and you are twenty, you can look to somebody who is thirty and single and learn from their life. If you are a young mother, you can look to a godly mother who has raised her kids and learn from her example. If you are someone whose dad walked out, you can look to someone else and learn through the process of mentorship and discipleship how to be a better, godly daddy and husband. We can learn from each other in the Body of Christ and in that way we encourage and sharpen one another.

Then, Paul says, as you walk after these examples, in verse 18,

“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”

So, Paul says, as much as you want to learn from good examples, you want to shun bad examples. Then, he describes what those examples are. It seems to be that these are professing Christians because in different places Paul identifies unbelievers one way, false teachers another way, but this seems to be people who have professed faith in Jesus. He says that ultimately they are enemies of the cross. What they are doing is sowing destruction into their lives. Their gods are their stomachs. That’s just the idea that fleshly desires are what compel and drive a person. Then, he gives clarity when he says that they take pride in shameful things. They celebrate and enjoy what offends God and should be avoided.

This is what we see in our society today. In the secular world we live in, people celebrate the very things that offend God, and they want to bring other people into that celebration. They want you to rejoice with them in their sin and so what they are ultimately doing is that they are pushing God out. They are putting that thing in the place of God. They are worshipping themselves. They are pursuing fleshly desires and saying, “Celebrate this with us as we worship what God hates.” It’s all around us. So, Paul is saying don’t learn from those people. Don’t let the world define sexuality for you. Don’t let the world define marriage for you. Don’t let the world define how you spend money, or materialism, or honor, or integrity. Look to godly examples and learn, because they’ve learned from godly examples, and they’ve learned from Christ. So, we look to Christ and then we need tangible examples. We looked a couple of weeks ago at Timothy and Epaphroditus. They were great examples for us to know how to live the Christian life. So, Paul says to look to good examples and shun bad ones.

Then, the fifth challenge for growth and maturity is this. Go to verse 20, and Paul says,

“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

So, it’s important that we live as a citizen of Heaven should live. Remember, Philippi was a Roman colony, which meant that it looked like a little city of Rome. So, when people walked into Philippi it would probably be a common thing for someone to say, “Oh, wow, look at this. This looks just like Rome.” Everything was sort of a scaled down version of what you had in Rome. The arena, the buildings, the structures, and the architecture, and statues to gods and goddesses would have reflected what you would see in Rome. So, this idea of citizenship was a powerful thing in that culture because people would pay money to become citizens and they would work hard to obtain Roman citizenship.

Remember, in the context of straining forward and pursuing the Lord, don’t forget this. Listen, Red Oak, you are members of a heavenly kingdom. This election doesn’t mean a whole lot in the big picture. What means a whole lot in the big picture is that we are citizens of a kingdom, and at the center of that kingdom is a throne, and seated on that throne is a King who will never be up for reelection, and He will only, always, ever be worshipped. He will judge perfectly and there will be no tapes or dirt to drag up on Him because He was sinless in His earthly existence and He has been perfect in His eternal being. He is righteous in every way, He is holy in perfection, and He rules and reigns over this kingdom that will never end. In fact, in that kingdom there is no Sun, there are no stars, there is no other light, because His glory radiates, and His name is Jesus, and He is the Son of God. He is our King, and because of His kingship we are given citizenship. And Paul says, if you think it’s a big deal to be a citizen of Rome, or if you think it’s a big deal to be a citizen of Philippi, it’s a really big deal to be a citizen of the kingdom of God. We have that, man! We have that. That’s the hope and the joy that we have as believers. Know who you are and who whose you are. Know that God loves you. Know that Christ died to make us His own.

Lastly, in verse 21, is this dense, heavy, beautiful doctrine. In verse 20, he says,

“We await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

Here’s what he is saying. We start this Christian life through the process of justification. We are made right before God on the work and merit of Jesus. We then continue—if you live as a Christian for one minute, like the thief on the cross, or one hundred years to a ripe old age as a Christian—that whole span of your life will be lived in constant shaping more into the image of Jesus. So that when you are a forty-year-old Christian you should look more like Jesus, sound more like Jesus, be more like Jesus than you did when you were a four-day-old Christian. All the course of our life leads us to conformity to Christ’s image. That’s called sanctification. Paul says it this way to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 3, “We are being changed from one degree of glory to the next.”

Our guys who were up there putting a roof on that school building at Chestnut Mountain Ranch this week—if you have ever done a shingle roof, what happens is that you nail down one shingle, and it’s about this big. If you nail down one shingle and walk off you’ve accomplished very little. And it can be overwhelming if you are shingling a building as big as the one they are doing. But you put down every shingle, one degree, one shingle at a time, and pretty soon, if you have enough people doing the work, you have a roof. In the Christian life, don’t look at the little picture all the time. Strain for what lies ahead, which is perfection and conformity to Christ. That’s what we are laboring toward, one degree of glory at a time. God is doing the work in us and we are doing the work through the power of Jesus. We are striving, and straining, and fighting, and working. We are not static and we are not just sitting back. We aren’t just chilling.

We have the OLD School[[89]](#footnote-89) crew with us tonight and they are getting ready to go do the climbing section, which is just phenomenal. To do multi-pitch routes just blows your mind. And no rockclimber ever got on the side of a cliff and went, “Alright, rope, get me up. Let’s do it. Okay, belay person, pull me up.” It doesn’t work that way, but how critical is that rope? Unless you’re suicidal and you want to free climb, the rope is really important when you fall. Sanctification is that there is a tension that constantly keeps you from falling very far. It’s there and the presence of God in your life is constant, but you’ve got to work to grow. It’s a task that never ends until verse 21—because of the resurrection of Jesus we have first been raised to walk in newness of life. We saw this last week in the baptism of three of our little ones—raised to walk in newness of life. But do you know that there is coming a day when the eastern sky will split wide open. There will be a trumpet that blows. I don’t know exactly what this looks like but the Bible talks about it. Jesus will return in glory and splendor just as He said He would, and He will take us to be with Him in His heavenly kingdom or we will taste death first and it will be no more than a dimension that we go through. Some of us are going to die. Most of us will probably die before we see the Lord and it will simply be a dimension we go through where the resurrection of Christ gives way to our eternal resurrection. Justification gave way to sanctification, which will, through death and resurrection give way to glorification, where forever, and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever there will be no more addiction, no more porn struggles, no more anger with my wife struggles, no more mad at the boss struggles, no more watching what I shouldn’t watch, no more weeping over the pain that someone else has caused, no more dealing with past guilt or my past sin, or past sin that was committed against me. There will be none of that. It’s done. It is no more. It will be a place of glorious perfection and you are part of the perfection, not part of the brokenness.

See, in this world, you and I are part of the brokenness, and we need Jesus to constantly shape us into His image, so that we can be part of the solution for other people coming to know Jesus. But there is coming a kingdom where, through our own resurrection, we will be glorified. Just as, right now, we are being sanctified, we will be made like Jesus forever, with a perfect knowledge of Him, and we will worship Him with purity of heart and purity of motive with no distractions, in a kingdom that will never end. It’s called Heaven and it’s going to be a good place. I hope you will start thinking about it because you are going to spend a lot of time there if you’re a Christian. Go ahead and put it on your radar. There are some good passages you can read about it. Study the book of Revelation, particularly the last three or four chapters, which paint this powerful picture of Heaven. Study the beginning of Genesis, where the Garden of Eden is described. A lot of theologians think that is kind of what we are looking at. It will be a restored state of being. It’s going to be awesome, amen?

So, we don’t look back. We forget achievements and we forget failures. We have too much ahead of us this week. Tomorrow, tonight, when you get home, work, strive, strain, pursue, and know that at the end of this thing called sanctification that we are going to be more like Jesus and then, ultimately, we are going to be just like Jesus. It’s going to be awesome and we will be with Him forever. Amen?

I will pray and then we will worship in song. I invite you tonight, if you don’t know the Lord, or if you are here visiting and you are not a Christian, we would love to talk to you. There’s nothing magic in anything we are going to say. You can just call on the name of the Lord and be saved and worship Jesus as Lord. But, if you don’t know Him, come talk to me or to one of the other pastors. JC Christensen is sitting right here and he’ll talk to you. Jenn Forchetti is sitting back there and she will talk to you. You talk to any girl or dude here, just find somebody, and they will tell you about Jesus. They will help you to understand what it is to have a relationship with Jesus. You call on the name of the Lord and you can be saved, and get on this journey we are talking about, amen?

I’ll pray and we will sing.

God, I pray that as we worship you in spirit and in truth, particularly and specifically through song and through response to your Word, I pray that you would help us to be faithful and obedient in the way that we worship. I pray that we would love you because you first loved us, and that we would understand the depth of doctrinal truth that’s laid out in this passage that paints a picture of this journey from death and sin to justified and made righteous by the work of Jesus. We are defined by Jesus not by our own failure. Then, the long process of being sanctified and set apart, washed in your blood, filled with your Spirit, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God to do great and mighty things for the sake of the kingdom, that one day we will enter into through the dimension of death or by your return, and we will be made like Christ forever. Help us to strain, and strive, and work as we look forward to what’s in front of us, and as we engage the enemy, that we don’t become entangled, but that we engage and move on, and that we fight, and labor, and toil, and work to honor one another and to worship you obediently and faithfully. Please receive this time of worship through song as an offering and a gift as we bless and praise your name. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

(Spencer Davis)

That was good. That was real good. This world is not our home. It is so exciting thinking about the upward call in Christ Jesus—the goal in Christ when we will no long struggle with sin. When we will no longer struggle with addictions and identity issues, but that we will be there. But, you can’t look toward the eventual goal without today’s struggles and without today’s footsteps. Do you know what I’m saying? You can’t look toward the end without having to run the race today. That, for us, in striving toward that goal, looks like us battling the alarm clock, and battling our attitude at the kitchen sink, and us battling conversations, and tireness, and not wanting to pursue the Lord. So, I encourage you, church, this week, to take these practical truths and to apply them. Pursue hard after the Lord and strive after the Lord minute by minute. Strive after the Lord in the Word.

So, our benediction for tonight comes right there from Romans 11.

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord,

or who has been his counselor?”

35 “Or who has given a gift to him

that he might be repaid?”

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

October 30, 2016

Philippians 4:8-13

Spencer Davis

Hello everybody. Everybody doing well? Good. Turn in your Bibles to Philippians 4. That’s where we are going to be tonight. If you are new to Red Oak, we are teaching through the Book of Philippians and we are about done with it. We are going to go to the book of Luke next, which I’m really excited about. Going into the Christmas season, going into Luke is going to be awesome. Philippians 4 is where we are going to be.

If you were with us last week, we heard from Blue and Britt Berry. Their testimony was powerful and it really affected me last week. It was such a powerful demonstration of God’s grace and their trust and contentment in Christ, even in such a terrible tragedy as their daughter dying. Two weeks ago, we were in Philippians 4 and were looking at anxiety. I think it was fitting that we had Blue and Britt tying into their contentment in Christ—their acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty in all things. Because tonight we are going to be right back there. We are going to be talking about contentment and anxiety.

I kind of prayed that the Lord would give me these verses to preach, and then I kind of prayed that He wouldn’t, because these verses have really kicked my tail. These verses on anxiety—my wife will tell you that these are things that I struggle with, personally. It’s not like a clinical anxiety, but y’all know that anxiety is just worrying. It’s you worrying for future you. You spending time worrying for future you. All throughout the Scripture, Old Testament and New Testament, God tells His people, “Don’t worry. Don’t be anxious.” The reasons that He gives them to not be anxious are: I’m near, I’m powerful, I’m close, I’m with you. It’s so reassuring. And it’s cool, especially in these verses, because very rarely in the Scripture does God give us step-by-step instructions for how to tackle an issue, but here He does. Here, He’s saying that if you are anxious or if you don’t have contentment, here’s what you need to do; you need to think like this: bam, bam, bam, bam. Then, you need to act like this: boom, boom, boom. You need to recognize these things that are true. It is so helpful because people all throughout the Scripture have struggled with anxiety, worry, and being freaked out.

When I was a kid, I didn’t really think about this that much, because as a kid, or as a teenager, you don’t really worry about too much. But the older I get the more I get freaked out by stuff and the more I’m anxious. And the Lord was really so gracious to me when we had our first child. She’s eight now and she’s in the room. When we had Alani I was really anxious and nervous. I was nervous when she went to bed and slept, when she’d make a noise I’d be like, “Ohhh, what was that?!” I’d go check on her. I’d freak out about, “How much is she eating? How much is she pooping? How much is she drinking?”—so much so as it was to where my wife said, “You’ve gotta stop. You’ve gotta chill out. You’re driving me nuts. For real, don’t write down what she’s eating. She’s going to be alright. She’s going to be fine. Don’t jump up every time she’s sleeping.” The Lord was so gracious to me.

One night, we were living in our old house up off of Junaluska and I remember this so vividly. One night Alani was laying in bed and she was a newborn. She was all swaddled up and wrapped up really tight. I was sleeping lightly because I was so freaked out and I heard her over there choking. I threw off the covers, and I ran over, and I was all out of breath. My sister was staying with us and she heard me and she came in the room like, “What’s going on?!” I was like, “Alani’s choking! She’s choking!”—but, she wasn’t. She was breathing normally. I looked down at her and it was such grace from the Lord, because it was as if He almost audibly said, “What are you going to do? Let’s say she is choking, what are you going to do? You have no power. Let’s say she is dying in bed—what power do you have?” I just sat there in my bedroom and realized that I had nothing—I had no power over this kid. It might seem kind of dark, but for me it was so freeing. I realized that God is sovereign and I am not. “Thank you. Thank you, Jesus.” It gave me such peace knowing that God is in control of this kid. God formed this kid in her mother’s womb. God brought her out in birth. God is sustaining her with food. I have no idea how this happens but God is in control and I can’t do anything.

So, we look at these verses about anxiety and see that this is a problem that is common to man. You might be anxious about your finances. You might be anxious or worried about your future, your kids, or your retirement. For you younger folks, what’s next? Do you go to college? Do you not? Do my kids go to college? What are we supposed to do?

So, I’m going to jump right into Philippians 4. We are going to be talking about contentment and we are going to be studying verse 8, but I want to go back just a little bit. Tonight, we are going to be talking about contentment, and contentment is just being happy—being happy with what you’ve got and being satisfied with what you have. You are sufficient with what you have. You are satisfied and you are happy. You are content. You are full. 1 Timothy will tell us that “godliness with contentment is a great gain.” If you are godly and you are content with what you have, that’s great gain. Because so many of us are not content with the amount of money that we have, or we are not content with our social image, or we are not content with our appearance. “I’m not content. If I could just lose a few more pounds. If I could just grow a few more inches or be a little stronger. If I could just have a little more money put aside. If I could just…if I could just…if I could just.” And here, Paul is saying, “You need contentment. You need godliness but you also need contentment.” This is great gain, because a lack of contentment usually comes from one of two avenues. It usually comes from anxiety, where we are freaked out for future us because we don’t trust the Lord enough, so we have our hope in worldly means, so we are not content, or it comes through greed, where we just want more. We want more stuff or more popularity. We just want more.

So, let’s go to Philippians 4. In verse 1, Paul is kind of wrapping up. This is the last chapter in the book of Philippians and he is wrapping up his letter. He says,

“Therefore, my brothers, who I love and I long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm thus….(or stand firm like this)…in the Lord, my beloved.”

So, he’s getting ready to tell them, “This is the end of my letter. I’m going to tell you guys that you need to stand firm and I’m going to tell you how to do this.” Stand firm like this. The two things he goes on to address in this little section about how you stand firm, church, are arguing and anxiety. We talked about arguing a lot last week. This week and last week, we talk about anxiety.

Let’s look at the end of verse 5. At the end of verse 5 he actually starts a sentence here, and he says,

“The Lord is at hand.”

Yahweh is near. The Lord is at hand. So, don’t be anxious about anything.

“Do not be anxious about anything.”

You could stop there. That sermon will preach itself. God is near—don’t be worried. God is close—don’t be anxious. Don’t be freaked out. God is at hand—do not be anxious about anything.

But, if it wasn’t enough that God is close, we also have this avenue, Paul says,

“But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

What a wonderful gift prayer is. It’s casting your cares on God and that implies letting our cares go. For me, when I was freaked out over our daughter in her bed, I was praying a lot. I wasn’t thankful, though. I was saying, “God, please let her live, please let her live, please don’t let her choke, please, please….” I was praying but I was not casting my cares on the Lord. It was almost like an incantation, like I was just reciting something. I wasn’t truly praying and giving it away to God. I wasn’t casting my cares on the Lord—I was just repeating my fears to the Lord. There’s a huge difference.

1 Peter 5:7 says,

“Cast your anxieties on the Lord because He cares for you.”

The word he uses for “cast” is the same word used in another book for saddling something. It’s saying to take this and cast it on a donkey. Be done with it. You set it on there and now the donkey bears the burden. Cast your anxieties on the Lord and now He bears that burden. We don’t just recite our anxieties to the Lord in prayer, like, “God, I’m freaked out about money. I’m so freaked out about money. I really need some more money. Just help me with this money.” Cast it, set it on God and let Him carry that burden. Cast your burdens on the Lord because He cares for you.

Paul says,

“But in everything by prayer and supplication…..with thanksgiving….”

Here’s the difference. You can pray, you can ask, and you can beg God, and still be anxious. But, it seems that you can’t be anxious and thankful at the same time. You can’t be anxious and thankful at the same time. Thankfully enjoying God and being happy in His nature melts away anxiety. You can acknowledge God’s sovereignty in the back of your mind and still pray and still be anxious. But this is worshipping God thankfully, rejoicing in God, and it brings God to the forefront as the vindicator, or the future vindicator of a situation.

Do you see what I’m saying? For me, in praying for Alani, I was just freaked out, when I should have been thankful. “Thank you, Jesus, for giving me this kid. She’s so awesome. She’s so wonderful. I’m so thankful that you have given me a daughter I can teach about the Lord.” Now, in retrospect, we just baptized Alani a couple of weeks ago. Thank you, Jesus! Imagine if I had the same thankful mindset then, in my anxiety, that I have now. It would have just been enjoyment. How much time did I waste on the hamster wheel of anxiety? Because the Bible says, “How many of you by freaking out (paraphrase) can add an hour to your life?”[[90]](#footnote-90) Nobody. You’re just going to waste time. You are just going to be on the treadmill or the hamster wheel. Paul says that if we are doing this, praying, and we are thankful, that – verse 7,

“The peace of God – God’s own peace – which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

This is a really cool verse. Zach talked about it two weeks ago. God’s peace goes beyond our understanding. We don’t understand how God is in total control. But here he says that God’s own peace is going to be like a guard or like a soldier. This same word for “guard” is used in 2 Corinthians to describe the king’s soldiers who were stationed out in the streets and looking for Paul. The soldiers were guarding the streets and waiting for Paul so they could arrest him. Paul says that God’s peace, metaphorically, will wait in the streets and wait for anxiety, to arrest it. God’s own peace will guard your hearts (your emotions) and your minds (your thoughts) in Christ Jesus. It will guard it. The same word is used for the shepherds who are out in the field keeping watch over, or guarding, their flocks by night. God’s own peace will guard you and look after you in your anxiety.

“The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts (your emotions) and your minds (your thoughts) in Christ Jesus.”

Martin and Hawthorn say this,

“The inner part of a person, then, so vulnerable to attack by the enemy, is that which God’s peace is set like battle-ready soldiers to protect.”[[91]](#footnote-91)

Our anxious thoughts—we are so vulnerable to attack by the enemy—but God’s own peace is there to protect us.

Now, with that as the intro, look at what he says in verse 8. Now he’s going to give us how not to be anxious and how to be content. How not to be worried and how to be happy in what you’ve got. Paul says this,

“Finally, brothers….”

He’s not ending the letter yet. He’s ending that section on standing firm. He’s saying, “Finally brothers…let me finish up here on how you stand firm.”

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Think about that. Now, pause for a second. This is really interesting, because the previous verse has just told us that, man, if you are anxious, you pray about it, you be thankful, and the peace of God will be like a soldier, ready to protect your emotions and ready to protect your minds. You would think, “I’m done. I’ve got God’s peace like a soldier protecting my mind.” But here, Paul is saying, “Yeah, God’s peace is what guards your hearts, so get to work. You’ve got to do something about the way you’re thinking.” Because part of the way that God is shielding us from anxious thoughts is by teaching us how to think. He’s not just in there saying, “Sorry, anxiety, you can’t come in here.” He’s rewriting how we should think. And He’s so gracious, because He’s given us a list. If you don’t want to be anxious, here are some things you need to think, and he gives us a long list.

Now, the Greek philosophers in this day would teach like this. They would give a long list of virtues, so the Philippians would kind of be like, “Oh, sweet.” They would recognize this form of being given a list of virtues to follow. But this isn’t like moralism. Paul is telling us that there’s a secret to contentment. So few people in our culture are content and are really happy with what they have. Have you ever met a person like that, who is truly content?

My granddaddy was like this. He was happy with what he had all the time. He downsized his house. He would lose this or that and he’d say, “Okay.” It wasn’t like indifference. He was content. He was happy with what he had and he was happy with who he was. He was just content. It was so rare that people were just drawn to him. You’ve met people like this. Some people are just happy. It’s not because they have enough—it’s just because they are content internally.

So, Paul is going to go on to tell us that there is a secret to contentment. It’s really cool the way he words it. There’s a secret to contentment. He tells us that in a minute. He says, “Finally brothers…think like this,” and he gives us a long list. I’m going to go through this list. If you are anxious, think like this. Just keep this verse up there and we will look at each one of these words. Here, Paul tells us how to think, and he says, “Think on this.”

Think on whatever is true. Alright, this could be a sermon by itself—think on whatever is true. This is whatever is honest. Whatever is true. This is whatever is genuine. It’s the same word that’s used in John 6, when Jesus said, “My flesh is true food. My blood is true drink.” In Matthew 14, it’s used for those in the boat who are worshipping Jesus, and they say, “’Truly, you are the Son of God.” Think about whatever is true. We could stop and preach here. Right? Think about what’s true in the Scripture. When it says, “Whatever is true, think on that,” think about what is true about you? What does the Scripture say about you, if you are a Christian? Not everybody in the room is a Christian, but if you’re a Christian the Bible says so much about you. It says you are adopted. It says you are holy. It says you have Christ’s righteousness. It says that your future is secure. It says that God is at work in you. It says that you are a joint heir with Christ. There are so many things that the Bible says are true about you. Pause and think about how much anxiety you have because you are not listening to the truth in the Scripture about you, but rather you are listening to lies that you produce. What lies about yourself are you believing? Things like, “I’m worthless. I’m useless. Nobody cares about me. I can’t overcome this.” Insert your lie here. Whatever is true—think about those things. Where do you find truth? Right here, the Scripture. Whatever is true, think about that. We could stop there. Because anxiety will melt away when you preach what is true to yourself. When you preach what is true about you and about Jesus, anxiety melts. It’s gone. Remind yourself of what’s true.

The second thing is whatever is honorable. This word honorable means serious, dignified, or noble. In 1 Timothy 3:8, it’s used when it says that deacons must be this word, and dignified is the way it’s translated. Deacons must be dignified or honorable. This is not vulgar or common.

The third word is whatever is just or righteous. It kind of reflects God’s righteous character. This is the same word that is used in Matthew 1:9, when Scripture talks about Mary’s husband, Joseph. It says that Joseph was a just man. He wasn’t shady. He was upright, he was righteous, and he was good. So, the Bible says, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, and whatever is just, think about those things. Remind yourself about those things.

It goes on to say that whatever is pure, think about that. Remember, this is a recipe to fight against anxiety. Whatever is pure, whatever is holy. Think about the Temple and the sacrifices. Whatever is holy. Whatever is sacred. Whatever is pure and without spot or blemish. Whatever is unpolluted and pure. This word is in 1 Peter 3:2, where it says that people see your respectful and pure conduct. This is, don’t think about sinful things, think about pure things. Don’t think about shady things, think about just things. Don’t think about vulgar things, think about honorable things.

I love the next word. This word is only used here in the New Testament. Whatever is lovely. Whatever is beautiful. Whatever is beloved. Whatever is cheerful and whatever causes pleasure. Yellow, fall leaves. Beautiful art. Beautiful songs. Kids laughing. Funny jokes. Whatever is pleasurable, or good, or lovely, think about that. Don’t think about crude things, or base things, or hurtful things. Think about whatever is lovely.

Whatever is commendable. This is whatever is worthy of praise or excellent. Whatever is spoken highly of. So, Paul goes on and says, “If there is any excellence.” We know that Paul uses this turn of phrase a lot to say, “Since there is.” *Since* there is excellence. If there is any excellence. If there is anything good or outstanding. 2 Peter 1:3 uses this word, where it says, “Him who called us to His own glory and excellence.” Then, Paul finishes this out in telling us how to think, when he says, “If there is anything worthy of praise, think about that.”

If you want to not be anxious, then change the way you think. Think about what is true. Think about what is honorable, and just, and pure, and lovely, and commendable, and excellent, and worthy of praise. What does this list sound like? It sounds a lot like God. Paul is really saying that whatever reflects the glory and the nature of God, think about that. Replace your thinking by thinking on Jesus.

Justin Martyr said this,

“The truth which men in all lands have rightly spoken belongs to us.”[[92]](#footnote-92)

So, everything good, and pure, and excellent in the world reflects God, because God is good, and pure, and excellent. So, this verse should serve as a sort of filter, right? We do a wilderness semester here at Snowbird, at the camp that we are sitting on here, and we use water filters. These water filters have different screens and different chemicals all depending on the different kind we are using. Basically, you can go to a big, muddy puddle, which we have done many times—a nasty, muddy, yucky, grime-on-top puddle—and you can put the water through the filter and it screens all the stuff out. You can get different kinds of filter and some do it really well and some don’t do it so good. Some of them have a taste in it. But, basically, you can filter all that stuff out, and the good, and the pure, and the clean water is left. So, this verse can serve as a type of filter to clean out our thoughts, right. It can serve as a sort of compass to direct our thoughts. If you are having anxious thoughts, filter them through this. Is what I am thinking right now true? Is what I am thinking right now, and what is freaking me out right now, honorable, or excellent, or lovely? Is this thing worthy of praise? Is this thought I am having about the security that my finances will have true? Is my security in my bank account balance? That’s not true. My security is not in my bank account balance but it sure feels that way sometimes. Sometimes we have to preach to ourselves to overcome these natural feelings that we have. How often are our thoughts not on what is true, and excellent, and worthy of praise?

Now, this doesn’t mean that our thoughts only dwell on sinful things, but how many times in a day do your thoughts ping pong back and forth on stupid stuff. “Aw, man, my schedule. Aw man, my to-do list. Oh, yeah, I’ve got to pick up so-and-so. Oh, yeah, we have soccer today. Oh, shoot, we’ve got to get dog food.” Your thoughts just kind of ping pong throughout the day—ping, ping, ping—even more when you have a cell phone that’s dinging all the time. Our thoughts are just ping ponging and this is saying, “Whoa!! Whoa!! Pause it man. We are supposed to be content.” Right? I think that a lot of times we fill our minds with these worldly thoughts and then complain that we are not content. “Man, I’m just not happy.” When all day long we’ve let our thoughts go, ping, ping, ping, ping, from worldly thing, to worldly thing, to worldly thing. It may not be sinful but it may not be excellent. It may be not sinful but may be not worthy of praise. These thoughts are something to replace our anxious thoughts with.

I watched a video that you should not watch. I watched a video of the tsumanis in Japan and good grief. You see them on the news and they are a big deal but I watched a couple of those videos and they are terrifying. Even fifteen or thirty foot waves are causing huge destruction, but there was this one wave in a video that I watched that was a hundred-fifty-two feet. It was humongous. It came up to a factory or a refinery or something, and this building had buses and cars all around it. This huge wave comes up and you think you know what’s going to happen; like it’s going to splash against the building and go around it. No, that wave took out every building, every car, every parking garage, and every tree—the things that you thought there was no way that a wave of water could take them, and it just flattened it. It took everything out and carried it for miles. And when I was thinking about these verses I thought that I need something so strong that it is going to uproot my anxious thoughts and flatten my anxious thoughts. Here, Paul is saying, it’s thankfulness, and it’s prayer, and it’s whatever is good, and lovely, and trustworthy. Think on these things and they will replace, and flatten, and knock out these anxious thoughts that you have.

So, just as an example, if you’re worried about your bank account balance and thinking about the security that’s going to hold, think about the truth instead. If you are worried about the upcoming election and the moral health of our nation, think instead about dignified things. If you are worried about injustices in our world, think about what is just. If you feel like you are beat down by your own sin, then think about Christ’s purity that’s imputed to you. Replace all of these things with this tsumani of Christ-centered, worthy-of-praise love. Think on what’s lovely. Think on what’s commendable. Think about what is excellent. For real, take the time this week to dwell on Christ, to dwell on the sovereignty of God, and then pause for a minute. These things in the list aren’t less important—think about things that are really beautiful. Think about that. Pause for a minute. We live in one of the most beautiful places on Earth if you live around here. Have you appreciated the leaves? Most of them have changed from yellow and are turning red and it’s about over. We have a week left, maybe. Pause for a minute. Look up and watch them fall and just smile at it. For a minute remember that you aren’t your bank account balance. For a minute remember that you aren’t your job, that you aren’t your retirement, that you aren’t this project that you’re working on. Remember what is true about you and then preach that to yourself. “God loves me. God created me. God is sovereign and I can’t do anything. God’s in control, but look at what He’s given me to appreciate.” It’s so good. Think on these things.

You go to the big list—whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise—think about these things. Now, the word he uses there for think about, is the word consider, or focus on, or dwell on, or reckon, or calculate, or take into account, or reason by a mathematical process. He’s saying that you are going to have to decide to think about these things because it will not come naturally. It is commanded to you because it is hard to do. Nobody naturally is like, “Man, I’ve got no cares in this world because God is sovereign. I’m being responsible with my own personal choices and at the same time God is sovereign over everything.” No, that doesn’t come natural to anybody. So, God is commanding it because it’s hard to do. The implication is that whatever is on this list to think about it and whatever is not on the list to discard it. That’s hard to do, but it’s a recipe for how not to be anxious. If God’s peace is going to guard out hearts, think like this.

Now, Paul gives us a second list in verse 9. He says,

“What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things.”

Practice that. So, the first list was, if you are anxious think about these things—boom, boom, boom, boom. Now he says to practice these things—boom, boom, boom. So there is a list to think about and a list to practice. Thank you, Paul, for some practical, step-by-step instructions for not being anxious. Practice these things. Paul breaks out a second list and says, “What you have learned from me.” Now, Paul, specifically taught the Philippians God’s Word. So, they have primarily learned God’s Word. All of these things have come from Paul. The second thing is “What you have received from me.” Now, Paul received God’s Word as it was passed on by others, and the Philippians are, in turn, to pass that on as well. So, he says, “What you have learned from me”, the Word, and “What you have received from me” and then he says, “What you have heard me say and seen me do.” What a tall order. “Act like I act,” is what Paul is saying. “What you have heard and seen”—this is Paul’s conduct and his words on display. He said this before in 3:17. Thank you, Jesus, for giving us a recipe for not being anxious. Listen to the whole recipe. If we are to zoom out and just look at the verses in this chapter, Paul says, “Here is the recipe for not being anxious:

* Number one, rejoice in the Lord.
* Number two, recognize that Yahweh is close—the Lord is near.
* Number three, remember that you are commanded, “Don’t be anxious.” That’s huge.
* Number four, pray. You can bring your anxieties and cast them off. Let them go. Load them up on God. Pray and bring your anxieties to God.
* Number five, be thankful, which is mutually exclusive with anxiety. You can’t be anxious and thankful at the same time.
* Number six, if you do these things, God’s own peace will be a shield and a guardian for your anxious heart.
* Number seven, think real, deep, God-reflecting thoughts. This is going to take discipline.
* Number eight, practice what you’ve learned; which is obey the Lord, abide in the Vine, and walk in Jesus.

So, this recipe is:

* Rejoice in the Lord.
* Recognize that the Lord is near.
* Follow the command to not be anxious.
* Pray.
* Be thankful.
* Remember God’s peace will shield you.
* Think real, deep, God-reflecting thoughts.
* Practice what you’ve learned. – Obey the Lord. Abide in the Vine. Walk in Jesus.

Do that and it’s going to be really hard for you to be anxious. Right?

The last one is really important. When Paul says to practice what you’ve learned, he’s basically saying, “Obey the Word. Do what you know to do,” because you can’t be rebellious and expect contentment. You can’t be rebelling against God and being sinful, and then be like, “Why am I anxious about this stuff?” “I’m sleeping around; why am I anxious?” “I’m looking at porn; why am I anxious?” Paul says to make sure that you’re practicing these things and make sure that you are following after Christ.

Then, look at the last phrase he says here in verse 9,

“What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things…”

Now, let this thought blow your mind.

“…and the God of peace will be with you.”

Now, Paul has already said that the peace of God is going to be your shield. Now, he’s saying that the God of peace is going to be with you. It’s really cool the way that he’s bookended this. The peace of God is your shield, but He’s not just sending His peace—He’s stepping out and coming himself. The God of peace will be with you.

So, the antidote to anxiety is really wrapped up in this. Don’t be anxious because Yahweh is near. Pray to Him. His peace will be guarding you, but better than that, the God of peace will be with you. It’s not just God’s peace, but it’s the God of peace, himself, who will be with you. He is near.

Hebrews 13 says this. It’s talking about being freaked out by money and he says in verse 5,

“Keep your life free from the love of money and be content (or happy, or satisfied, or full) with what you have, because….”

Listen to the reason he gives for contentment. Be content with what you have because God said,…

“…I will never leave you or forsake you.”

Pause. This seems weird. It seems like he should say something like, “Be content with what you have because…it’s enough.” But, he says, “Be content with what you have because Yahweh is right here.” God is with you. God is near. The implication is that you should be content because God is near. God won’t leave you, but money will. God won’t leave you but money will. You can’t put your hope in the same things the world does and then expect God’s peace to be guarding you. Right? We can’t hope like the world hopes and then expect this heavenly contentment to rain down on us when our hopes are in the same thing that the world has, like our bank accounts and our retirement.

Now, this usually is centered around money, but it’s not always around money. In this situation it’s mainly around money, because in the next verse, verse 10, Paul is talking about this. You know that Paul is bi-vocational, right? He is traveling around to all these different cities, and he’s encouraging these churches, and he’s getting some financial support from the churches sometimes, but he also has a job. He has a tent-making job on the side. So, he’s been talking about being content with money and saying that the God of peace is going to be with you, then he says this in verse 10. He turns the subject back to money and says,

“I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.”

What’s he talking about? He’s saying, “Thanks so much for sending me a check.” Right? He’s telling them thank you. Now, some people believe that this verse is sarcastic because of the way it’s worded. When you read that, it sounds like they finally sent him a check, and some people say that Paul is being super sarcastic here. They say that he’s saying, “I was so excited that finally, at great length, you woke up from your stupor and finally sent me a check. Thank you so much!” Paul is not being sarcastic here, because the wording is too rich for him to be being sarcastic. Paul is saying, “I rejoice in the Lord,” not primarily in you guys and not primarily in the check you sent. “I rejoiced in the Lord…greatly…that this concern that you had has now blossomed or revived.” Paul clarifies it and says, “Now, you were always concerned for me but you didn’t have an opportunity to give.” Right? “You have always been concerned.” He is turning the subject back to money and he is getting to the whole theme of contentment. He’s saying, “I’m so happy that at length your concern has revived. You’ve sent this check and it’s great.” Then he goes on in verse 11,

“Not that I’m speaking of being in need…”

He’s reassuring them, “I’m not preaching to you all of this stuff about money to say to you, ‘Can you please send me some money?’” He’s not preaching this to them to try to fundraise. He’s saying, “I’m not talking about being in need.”

I hope you guys get this because when I read this it really, really blew me away. He says this in verse 11,

“I’m not talking about being in need…”

Why? The word “need” here is the same word as when it’s talking about the widow’s mite and it’s translated as “poverty.” Paul is saying, “I’m not poor…I’m not in poverty here,” and you expect the reason for him to say that is something like, “Because I had a great tentmaking season,” or “Because the church at Thessalonica has been donating. I’m good to go.” But Paul says, “I’m not talking about being poor or being in need,” and the reason that he cites for not being in need is so unexpected. He said, “I’m not talking about being in need because I’m content.” That’s huge. We would expect him to put on opposite ends of the spectrum—on this side is poverty and on this side is wealth. But he doesn’t do that. He says, “On this side is poverty but I’m not there; I’m all the way over here in contentment.” Isn’t that crazy? It is basically saying that contentment is not the absence of need. You can be content and have nothing. You can be content and have everything. Or you can have nothing and not be content. Or you can have everything and not be content. Paul is saying, “I’m not talking about being in need because I’m content.” This contentment, in being happy with what you have or with where you are at, is so rare. Paul is saying, “I’m not poor, I’m content. I can’t be poor, I’m content. I’m happy with what I have…” Because, he goes on,

“…for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.”

He’s learned this. The Law and God’s Word were his schoolmaster, but also his experiences taught him what is really necessary. It’s to be content. And now he tells us how. He says, “Listen, I know what it’s like to not have anything.” He says,

“I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.”

Paul has the secret of contentment. He is saying, “I’ve been there. I’ve been in a place where I didn’t know where the next meal was coming from and I’ve been in a place with plenty. I’ve been in a place where I’ve had tons of needs and I’ve been a place where there were no needs. I’ve learned a secret throughout the years—the secret of being content over there and the secret of being content over here.” We know that Paul has been in these situations, because in 2 Corinthians 11, it tells us how low he got. This is Paul describing how low he got,

“Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? 30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”

He’s saying, “I’ve been brought low. I’ve been without. I’ve been beaten, I’ve been stoned, I’ve been shipwrecked…” and he goes on in 1 Corinthians 4:11,

“To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, 12 and we labor, working with our own hands.”

He knows how to be brought low and to be humbled, and he knows how to overflow. What is the secret that Paul has to being content in every situation? When he has plenty and when he is hungry, and when he is in need and when he has abundance? The secret that Paul is fixing to give us, the secret to contentment, in any and every circumstance, Paul says, “I have learned the secret.” This word “secret” carries the idea of initiation, like “I have been initiated into this secret.” Here’s the secret,

“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

How often is this verse taken out of context? This verse is talking about being freaked out because you don’t have enough money. It’s talking about being content in every situation. But you will see this verse tonight, as you watch Sunday night football, in the crowd where someone is holding up this verse, or where someone has it written on their cleats, or someone has it written on their eye black, “I can do all things through Christ.” This verse, we use more often than not as like a hat tip to Heaven, like, “Thank you, Jesus, for giving me all the strength to run this touchdown. I can do all things through Christ.” We see this verse yanked out of the context here and plopped wherever, and we say, “I can do all things…I can do anything…through Christ who gives me the strength.” But, we better watch out, because if we pull this verse out of context we can make it say things that are deadly, like, “I can get rich through Christ who strengthens me,” or, “I can speak publicly through Christ who strengthens me.” We can try to use Christ as a gumball machine to get anything we want, and that’s deadly. Christ doesn’t work like that. Christ can’t be manipulated.

So, you read this verse and you see that you need to know how to have contentment. You need to know how to not be freaked out in all these situations, even if you don’t have anything, and even if you don’t know where your next paycheck is coming from, or how you are going to retire on what you have. How do you not be freaked out? Paul says, “I’ve learned the secret…and it’s Jesus.” A lot of times, for me, if I just stop there on the surface level, I’ll go, “Is that it? Of course I know the answer is going to be Jesus. That’s the Sunday school answer, “I can do all things—Jesus!” But then I’m still freaked out. But what Paul is saying here is not just like, “Say the name ‘Jesus’ and all your anxiety will melt away.” He’s not saying that. Christ is the secret to Paul’s contentment but it’s not just acknowledging that Christ is there. Listen to what he says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” And this word is a cool word. It means something like, “Who continually infuses me with power.” “I can do all things because Christ is continually infusing me with His own power.” And the word he uses for “strengthen” or “power” here—I want to read a couple of verses that talk about this same word and this same power. So think, “I can do all things through Christ who does this to me.”

Acts 1:8 uses this word when it says,

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”

In Matthew 22:29, he says,

“You need to know the Scripture in order to know the power of God.”

Luke 22 says,

“From now on the Son of man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”

Romans 1:16 says,

“I’m not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation.”

Romans 1:20 says,

“For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived.”

1 Corinthians 1:18 says,

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

1 Corinthians 6:14 says,

“And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.”

2 Corinthians 13:4,

“For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God.”

This is huge. Revelation 11:17,

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.”

Now, Paul is saying, “God is infusing you with that power!” You can be content in every situation because of Christ who is at work in you. Right? Christ isn’t just like the name Paul names that out there is contentment; Christ is his ability to be content. Christ infuses him with power to be content, so that in every situation, Jesus is working on Paul to make him content. And part of the way that he is working on him is—practice this, and think like this. Christ is at work rewriting his thoughts.

What was said about the Pharisees, when Paul said, “You don’t know the Scripture or the power of God”—that can also be said of me. When I’m kneeling over my daughter’s bed and I’m saying, “Is she choking?,” I don’t understand the power of God. I don’t understand God at work in the situation. Like a tsumani that’s knocking down buildings and trees, God is so much bigger than our paycheck. He’s so much bigger than what’s got you freaked out right now.

Anxiety is caused by self-reliance. Contentment comes from Christ. So, I think that what dominated Paul’s mind, when we look through Philippians all he talks about is Christ…Christ…Christ…Christ. He tells us to keep your eyes on Christ, mimic Christ, be in Christ, follow the example of Christ, live worthy of Christ. All things are lost but Christ is your God. Rejoice in Christ. Think on Christ. Christ is near. The power of Christ is at hand. The peace of Christ is near. It is clear what dominated Paul’s mind so it’s clear that what should dominate ours as well. So, I think that the reason we are anxious and the reason that we are not content is that our minds aren’t filled with Christ. They are filled with earthly things. They really are. We fill our days with earthly practices and earthly thoughts and the danger is that, eventually, our hope will look just like the world’s hope. We will hope in a politician. We will hope in November 8. We will hope in our bank account. We will hope in money. And as soon as that starts to waver we will freak out because we put our hope in the wrong place, which started by putting our thoughts in the wrong place, and putting our practices in the wrong place. Our minds are on earthly things so we are not thankful and we are not prayerful.

I want to read this last verse. We are talking about contentment. I came across this verse in my study this week and I loved it. It is such a cool picture of being happy in Christ, and it gives the reason that we are happy. It’s an Old Testament verse in Psalm 131. David is talking here, toward the end of his life, and he says this,

“O Lord, my heart is not lifted up;

my eyes are not raised too high;

I do not occupy myself with things

too great and too marvelous for me.”

What’s he saying? He is humble. He is not prideful. He’s not seeking himself. He says, “My heart is not lifted up. My emotions and my desires are not lifted up high. I’m not seeking my own glory. My eyes are not raised too high. My goals aren’t raised too high. He says he is not worried about things that are too great or too marvelous.” He’s literally saying, “I don’t walk in things that are too great for me….My mind isn’t tied up with things I can’t fix.” He’s not being anxious. Look at what he says,

“But I have calmed and quieted my soul,

like a weaned child with its mother;

like a weaned child is my soul within me.”

Man, that’s really good. It’s a picture of contentment. We have three kids. I told you about Alani, our firstborn. She barely drank any milk when she was a baby. That’s part of the reason I was so freaked out. We would fix this big bottle and she would sip down two ounces of milk. Two ounces of milk is nothing but she’d drink two ounces and be all full. But, when our son came along he was much larger. He was like ten pounds three ounces at birth, so he was a big old, fat, chunky kid. So, when we would go to feed him, if we would put two ounces in his bottle he would just laugh at us. He would be so hungry and so angry when it came to feeding time he would just scream. So, we started giving him more and more. It was two ounces, then it was four, and then it was six, and then we would give him a full eight-ounce bottle and it still wasn’t enough. So, we started putting scoops of baby oatmeal in his bottle and make a baby smoothie, and that would just knock him out. He’d be screaming and freaking out because he was so hungry and we would put this bottle in his mouth, and it was funny because he’d go to town for the first four ounces or so and then you’d see him start to get glassy eyed. It was funny because when you pulled the bottle out of his mouth he’d be in a sleep coma. There was nothing you could do to wake him up. I’d sit him up, and hold his face, and squeeze his back to burp him and he would just be done. When he would settle down with Amy after he’d been fed he would snuggle in and be a perfect picture of contentment. And that is what the Scripture is saying here, “Like a weaned child with his mother…like a weaned child…that’s how my soul is.” I’m perfectly full. I’m content. I’m happy. I’m safe.

Why? “Oh, Israel, hope in Yahweh.” Because hope is in the Lord. Paul is not reasoning and hoping with worldly reasoning and hoping. His hope is in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. He found the true source of contentment, which is Christ, who continually infuses us with strength. That’s our goal—that we would be so content in Christ that our mind would be occupied with truthful, excellent thoughts that are worthy of praise. Anything that reflects Christ’s nature. And at the end, that we wouldn’t be anxious and rooting around about something we can’t do anything about, but that the picture would be like that of a child with his mother, and that we settle down totally content because our hope is in God and God is near. That’s it—our hope is in God and He is so very close. Like a child with his mother, God is close, and it’s not just that God is close. He doesn’t stop with a child and a mother, but He’s inside of us and rewriting how we think. He has given us hope and the God of peace will be with you. The God of peace will be with you.

Let’s pray.

Jesus, I pray that you would help us to combat anxiety with your Word. That we would combat anxiety and that we would be content in every situation, whether we have a lot or whether we don’t have a lot. If the bills aren’t paid, I pray that we could be content. Not that we would be inactive, though, because you’ve told us to practice some things and think some things. That we would not be inactive but that we would be content in you. I pray we would be trusting in your sovereignty. God, I pray for our church that we would be characterized as a church that reads your Word, and believes it, and acts on it. God, I pray that our thoughts would be pure and excellent. I pray that mine would, too, God. I pray that you would remove anxiety from me, God. We are praying this and we are thankful for what you’ve done, God. I pray that your peace would guard our hearts and mind. We want to worship you now. In your name I pray, Amen.

(Brody Holloway)

Listen, I want to leave this thought and practical application. It’s so critical. Tonight’s text was loaded with practical application. Spencer is such a practical teacher. I love it.

Today, we were out in the yard. I don’t have a green thumb. I should know trees and leaves because I’m a woodsman, I think. But, apparently I’m not, because three times in the last week someone has asked me, “What kind of tree is that?” and I’ve said, “It’s made out of wood. I can tell you that much. It makes paper, fire, and oxygen somehow.” So, there is this beautiful vine growing all over the side of the bank at my house. Little is really good at planting stuff and she has a green thumb. There is this really cool vine and I’ve admired it for weeks and months, back into the summer. What I didn’t know is that it was a sweet potato vine, because in the fields where I hunt deer the sweet potatoes didn’t look like that. So, today Little was over there pulling these vines up and I was like, “Why are you pulling those vines up? They’re so awesome looking.” Well, there were big old sweet potatoes coming up, and I thought, the Christian life should be like that. What is beautiful on the outside should be the result of what’s happening at the root of your life. There should be moments that it’s identifiable that Jesus is at work in your life. I’m going to tell you something, Red Oak. If in your life this week you want to make an impact for the Gospel in the community, you need to live as a contented person. We do not live in a contented world. Most people, if you ask them how they are doing you have made a mistake, because they are going to tell you and it ain’t going to be good. They are going to complain, and gripe, and bellyache. Contentment is illusive to people in their marriages and in their work.

But there’s another mental picture in my head. I went and watched my nephew practicing football and he’s peewee, so he’s five, and these little boys are running around. The helmets look so huge. Have you ever seen little guys playing football? They are toddling around out there and you think that it can’t be good for their necks, you know? They are running around and for some of the kids, literally, once the momentum gets them going they are done. They are going to fall over. And I feel like that is such a visual picture of how a lot of Christians are. We have this big, theological brain, because we love to read Grudem, and we love to study theology, and we love to use words like “sovereignty,” and “reformed,” and “election,” but we don’t have any practical application of the beauty of the Gospel at work in our lives. We just know a bunch of stuff. Like Spencer referenced tonight, when Jesus was talking to the Saduccees in Mark 12, and they asked Him a question to try to trick Him, He said, “You know what your problem is? You don’t know squat about the Bible.” These guys were offended because they memorized the whole Bible. Think about it and chew on that for a minute. They memorized the entire Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets, and Jesus said, “You don’t know anything.” Because knowledge that swells a theological brain but has no practical application is nothing more than head knowledge, and all it’s going to do is make you theologically top heavy, but there’s no root system. There is a word that kept coming up tonight and that word was “sovereignty.” In the sovereignty of God we can be content. Here is what that means. If you hear the word “sovereignty,” or if you hear someone talking about the “sovereignty of God,” that isn’t just something that applies to salvation. The sovereignty of God means that in all of history, in all of the calamities of the world, and all the calamity of your life, and the brokenness of your childhood, and the devastation of your past addiction, that God was still in control, Jesus was still on the throne, and He’s going to do good things regardless of how evil and bad the world ever gets. Nothing can stop the goodness of God from advancing the kingdom of Jesus. So, when you look back at your life with hindsight and you say, “I was an addict,” or “I was sexually molested and abused,” or “I was excommunicated from the Church,” or “I was in one broken marriage to the next broken marriage,” and you’re looking back at everything that has happened, what you can do is say, “Okay, I know what it means when God is sovereign. Because, when I look back at those things it is not like they are good things but I now see that God has redeemed them.” What that means is that God has given value to them. God has taken the brokenness in your life and He has given value to it. He has taken your past marriage that was broken, and it’s gone, and it will never be a reality again because you’ve moved into another relationship of covenant marriage, and you can look back at that and go, “What was I thinking?” and God is going, “I’m going to bring redeeming quality out of that.” We can’t reconcile God’s sovereignty in our minds because God says, “Don’t get divorced,” yet in His graciousness He blesses the marriage you are in now when you are faithful to Him. How does that work? Because God is sovereign, which means that He is in control even in the brokenness. So, you can look at your life and see that things have really been messed up.

I told you, the first night of this last round of membership classes was one of the most beautiful pictures of church I have ever had in my life. We sat on my porch and people were like, “I’m jacked up…I’m an addict…I’m hooked on porn…I got molested…I’ve been married seventeen times,” but at the end it was like, “Jesus!...Jesus!...Jesus! He’s bigger than all this!!” We are a church full of broken people who have met Jesus. Amen? If you have friends, and family, and neighbors who are screwed up, and messed up, and the world has thrown them so many curve balls that their head is spinning, and they don’t know how to pick themselves up off of the ground, you get them to Red Oak. They will meet a bunch of other misfits and screw-ups who have met Jesus, who have been cleansed by the power of the blood of the Gospel, and here is what it will all come down to—what we heard tonight—a group of people in this church who are content because they know the Author of life. They know the Giver of salvation and everything has been put in its appropriate place, and redeeming quality has been applied to every aspect of your life. So, you can go, “I grew up in a Christian family and things were good” or you can go, “I was hooked on drugs when I was in the fourth grade.” Yeah, man, I went to school with a kid who in the fourth grade was bringing drugs to school and he was messed up by sixth grade. I don’t know whatever happened to him. For some of you that is what your story looks like. The sovereignty of God means that He will bring you to a place where you can be content with where He has you, with who He is, and with the direction He is taking you.

So, the question is, “How does this apply this week and what do you do with this?” It’s loaded with application tonight. Go reflect on the message, reflect on what you heard, reflect on those lists, and actively pursue Jesus this week. Think back to that passage in Chapter 3, where we don’t look back and dwell on those things but we strain forward, we press forward, and we grab hold of the prize that’s in front of us, and we do so with contentment, because godliness with contentment is great gain. It’s great gain. People’s heads will spin when they see you content with Jesus and no more. Be content, and happy, and have joy. “The joy of the Lord is my strength”—Amen? Amen.

So, stand with me as I pray and read tonight’s benediction from the book of Jude. Pray with me.

Lord, I pray that as we go from this place that you would take your Word and apply it to our lives. That we would be faithful on our end to reflect on it, to meditate on it, to dwell on it, to ask questions of each other, to ask questions of ourselves, and to ask questions of your Holy Spirit in us. That we would press deeply into your Word and allow you to reveal yourself to us in a way that we are compliant, and obedient, and submitted, and surrendered to your plan for our lives and your direction for our lives. I pray that we would take what we have heard tonight, such clear and practical teaching, from such clear and practical Scripture, and that we would allow you to shape us, and mold us, and make us more like Jesus because of it. Help us to love our friends, and neighbors, and coworkers, and family members. Help us to live with contentment and to love you because you first loved us. Help us to be better mamas and daddies, better sons and daughters, better employees and employers, and help us to love you by loving others. Help us to love you by giving thanks and by living lives of thanksgiving and contentment. Help us to fight the anxiety that’s going to come and creep in and attack us. So, I pray that your Word would take root in our lives this week, for your glory and your honor, and your name’s sake. Amen.

From Jude 24,

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

November 6, 2016

Philippians 4: 14-23

Shawn Clark

Again, like Spencer said, I want to welcome everyone. I know that for all of you who are visiting with us, if you’ve just been with us a little while, the wives are saying to the husbands, “Oh, look, honey, it’s another bald guy.” It’s true. I’m another bald guy. For those of you who are visiting, my name is Shawn and I’m one of the pastors. We do have a pastor with hair, Zach Mabry. He’s holding strong for us all.

I’m coaching Termite basketball. That’s eight to ten year old boys. Yesterday, I had freshly shaved my head and we had a jamboree. That’s where we got to play three games with a twenty-five minute running clock. So, the boys on my team, before the game, came up to me and they were rubbing my head, and they said, “So, what’s wrong with your head?” I’m like, “What do you mean? I just shaved my head,” and they said, “But the two spots—why are they so shiny?” I was like, “Boys, that’s because I don’t grow hair there anymore.” They were like, “Oh, well it looks funny.” I said, “Well, thank you.” Yeah, eight to ten year olds.

Tonight, we will finish our journey through Philippians, like Spencer was saying. This is bittersweet for me because on one hand I am excited about our study in Luke. I’m excited for our church to walk through that. But I’m also sad about leaving Philippians because, for me, Philippians has been a huge deal. It’s the first book that the Lord led me to as a new believer, to walk through verse-by-verse, so there are not many days that go by where I don’t preach this to myself—what I’ve learned through Philippians. Or there are not many days that I don’t counsel what I have learned through Philippians with someone else. So, it’s bittersweet for me.

I love the Word of God and I love the way that the Lord speaks to us continually through it. Hopefully and prayerfully that is what Philippians has been for you. So, we are going to be finishing that tonight. I want to share something with you that D.A. Carson wrote,

“On the night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed for His followers in these terms, ‘Sanctify them by truth. Your Word is truth’ (John 17:17). There is no enduring sanctification apart from the truth of the Gospel taking hold of our minds. The way we avoid being conformed to this world, the way we are transformed into His conformity with Christ, is by renewing our minds (Romans 12:2).”

Prayerfully, you will continue to use what you have learned in Philippians. In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul says,

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

I can’t tell you how many thousands of times I’ve had to preach that to myself or speak that to someone else. So, my prayer for y’all is just like that for me – that you would continue to take what truth you’ve learned in this book and that you will continue to apply it to your life and others’ lives.

So, I want to pray and then we are going to jump into this text.

Lord, I love you and I thank you for loving us. Lord, I thank you so much for speaking to us. You are a good Father to us and you continually speak to us through your Word. Father, a lot of times we are disobedient children and we don’t listen to you. But, Father, tonight I pray that you would take away all distractions and that you would focus and fix our minds on what you have for us. Father, I pray that you would use me as a tool in your hand and as your mouthpiece to speak to your children, and to also speak to some that are with us tonight who are not your children. Father, I’m not so naïve as to believe that all of us in here are walking faithfully and in obedience to you. So, Father, I pray tonight that you would call unregenerate sinners to yourself; that those who are still trapped in darkness that you would call them to yourself. Father, we love you and I thank you for loving us. I pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Last week, while Spencer was preaching, I started thinking about this book and how it starts, and what’s in the middle, and what’s at the end. I started writing this down in my Bible. The way Paul starts his book out in Philippians is as a thank you. He’s thanking the Philippians and telling them how appreciative he is for them, and how much he loves them. In verse 7, he talks about the affections of Christ and this is how he feels for these people. He’s thanking them for who they are and for what they are becoming in Jesus. Then, in the middle of the book it talks about Christlikeness. Then, we have discipleship, we have truth spoken to us, and then the Gospel. Proclaiming the Gospel – these are major themes of this book of Philippians. Then, tonight, we are going to look at the end, where Paul is thanking them again. So, it’s a thank you letter, then the Gospel, then thank you again. So, hopefully, as we are leaving this book, you can take that and maybe you will jot it down in your Bible and the Lord will bring you back to remember the way that we’ve been able to walk through this and what we have learned.

Philippians

Thank you 🡪 🡪 Christlikeness 🡪 🡪 Thank you

Discipleship

Truth

Gospel

I want to read now what we are going to be looking at in Philippians 4:14-23. So, follow along as I read. Paul says,

“Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. 18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. 21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

So, last week, one of the things we looked at was what it means to be content. Let’s go back and reread those verses in 10-13. Spencer taught through this last week. Paul says,

“I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. 11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

We looked at what it meant to be content. I just want us to think for a second, what if Paul would have just stopped the letter right there? What if he just ended it? Do you think the Philippians would have been insecure about how they had ministered to Paul? Do you think they may have gotten to this point and thought to themselves, after just reading those verses, “Well, Paul doesn’t need our gifts. It appears from what we just read that he has learned in whatever situation to be confident. He knows how to be brought low and how to abound. In every circumstance he learned the secret of facing plenty, and hunger, and abundance, and need. He just said that he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him. So, why does he need us? He has the strength of Christ, so where do we fit in?” As I was reading those, I just had that thought. What were they thinking at this point? But, in this letter, Paul didn’t stop there. In fact, in verse 14, he says “yet”—or “Nevertheless,” or “In spite of the fact that I am strengthened by Christ or that I trust in the sovereignty of God,” – “Yet, it was kind of you to share in my trouble.” Basically, Paul was saying here, “You have done good to me. You have done a beautiful thing.”

What is Paul talking about here? He is talking about sharing in his afflictions and sharing in his suffering. Listen as he continues in verses 15-16,

“And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.”

Paul is not telling them anything they don’t already know and already feel. In verse 15, he uses the word ‘partnership’ again. For the Philippians, they know exactly what this word means to them and what it means to Paul. They know what kind of bond they have with Paul. They know what kind of love they have for him and that he has for them. As they are reading this letter, they can think back to what he has already said about them. Listen again, as I read Philippians 1:3-11. Listen to what Paul feels for these people.

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

They are thinking back to these very points. They are thinking back over the last years of their partnership together in the Gospel. They also know and realize that a bond like this can only be started and sustained by the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Gospel. Just reading these words and talking about them brings up strong emotions for me about the bond and partnership that I have with this community of believers in this church.

A lot of you don’t know this story, but eleven years ago Bethany was pregnant with Ty. It was a very difficult pregnancy. During that time she got really sick. We were in and out of the hospital. I know that I was in and out of the hospital with her, in Sylva, probably fifteen or twenty times. Each time, we would stay from two days to a week. It was on-and-off and back-and-forth. If you’ve seen Josh Martin’s PICC line[[93]](#footnote-93), through that time, Bethany had three of those PICC lines. I was giving her shots at home and I was changing IVs. She couldn’t keep any food down during that pregnancy. Her body was actually rejecting the pregnancy. And during that time it was very difficult. We had a lot of sleepless nights. There were a lot of nights where she was just throwing up time, after time, after time. We would get to a point to where I knew she was getting dehydrated, so we would take off to the hospital.

We had been married almost a year at the point where she got pregnant with Ty. And at this point in our marriage it had been tough. Even before her pregnancy, it had just been a tough, rocky road during the first year of our marriage. A lot of it stemmed from how she had been hurt in her past by the Church and by churches she had been a part of and grown up in. Her dad is a pastor and there are a lot of times when churches are not so nice to pastors. So, she had a lot of built up mistrust with churches. During this time in our first year of marriage there had been some difficult things that had gone on between Bethany and the trust that she thought she had with this community and with this church. In those days, we were just a small Bible study. A lot of times we would meet out on the porch or at Brody’s house in his living room. That was back in 2004, and during that period we kind of withdrew from this body. Bethany did specifically. I was still working at camp and it was just a really difficult time, because I knew this was where the Lord had us, and I knew He didn’t want us to leave, but like I said, we were going through some difficult times. And this pregnancy, God used it in both of our lives to draw us back, not only to himself but to this community.

During this time, I was speaking to a lot of guys who were close to me and still are close to me—guys who are part of this church and guys who I have served alongside of for a long time. They kept telling me, “Don’t leave. Don’t pack your bags and go somewhere else. Continue to seek the Lord. Continue to seek restoration between Bethany and this community.” I knew that they were speaking truth to me and I knew that was the right thing to do, but during that time, like I said, it was tough. It is tough when someone you love is in one place and other people that you love are in another place. You feel like you are caught in the middle. But, the bond that I had, not only with Bethany, but the bond that I had with this church and with this community, was strong. During that time in the hospital, the Lord used that pregnancy to break Bethany. I can remember this one specific night that the Lord really spoke to me. The doctor had just come to me and this was one of our lowest times. Bethany couldn’t keep anything down and they couldn’t get her medications straight. They couldn’t even get an IV in at this point in the night. I could see the panic in the doctor’s face when he came to me. He said, “Mr. Clark, if we can’t get this under control you may lose your wife and you may lose your child.” For me, being a new husband, and potentially losing my baby, I was in freak-out mode internally. Just like Paul, in what we just read, I knew that God was in control. I could tell you that. I knew about the sovereignty of God. I knew how much God loved me, and loved Bethany, and loved my baby that He was growing inside of her. But, I’ll tell you what ministered to me the most and that was my partnership with the people of this community. So, I picked up the phone and I called people. I said, “Hey, y’all be praying.” I knew that they were. Through that time, people kept coming to the hospital and loving on Bethany and loving on me. Through the next few months of God just using this community to surround Bethany with His love, there was restoration. I am so thankful, because since we didn’t pack our bags and run we were restored to fellowship. It is so much sweeter now.

So, when I hear Paul use this word ‘partnership’, specifically in talking about the Gospel, I know what that means. I could tell you story, after story, after story. A lot of you who are part of this community could tell the same stories of the partnership and the bond that you feel with this body of believers. So, when I read these words I can definitely tell you that I know what a partnership in the Gospel, forged and sealed by the Holy Spirit, feels like. As you grow in Christ and as you grow in the knowledge and experience of living in a community of the Church body that is fixed and focused on the Gospel you, too, will know what this bond and this partnership feels like and you will know exactly what Paul is talking about.

So, let’s continue in verses 17-20. Paul says,

“Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. 18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

These words I just read from Paul are also part of this partnership, this bond, in the Gospel. Paul used the word ‘sacrifice.’ Not only did he use that word but he also linked it to being acceptable and pleasing to God. This, too, is an act that can only be started, and carried out, and completed by the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul knows this to be true because he knows the Philippians. He knows what their lives looked like. He knows what kind of poverty they live in and he knows what afflictions they have had to endure from day to day. Paul knows that anything that this body of believers had ever sent to him is a work that only God the Father can do. The way in which they have continually ministered to Paul through the years can only be described as sacrifice. Paul could have used the word ‘generous,’ but what they had done for him in helping him and taking care of his needs goes deeper than being just generous.

As I was studying this week, I listened to a sermon from Alistair Begg, and in the sermon he used an article that he had read from the San Diego area. The article was talking about a lady who was married to a lady who was married to the guy who started McDonald’s. During the time of this article, the guy who started McDonald’s had passed away and now his wife was in control of all of the money they had accumulated through the years. The article was talking about how much money she had given to this YMCA in San Diego. She had given $80 million to this YMCA. For me, I can’t even imagine $80 million. So, the article was talking about what a generous gift this was and what she had done for this YMCA. But, as the article continued, it also talked about her net worth, which was $1 billion. Again, I can’t imagine $1 billion. So, for me, it was cool to help me think about what being generous looks like. What this lady did was generous, but her $80 million contribution to this YMCA didn’t really hurt her pocketbook. It was $80 million out of $1 billion. What she did was a generous act of kindness but there is a big difference between generosity and sacrifice, and Paul knew that the way that the Philippians had given to him was one of sacrifice.

I want us to think about what we have just heard and I want us to really get honest with ourselves and see if we are a generous giver or if we are one who gives sacrificially. Think about that for a minute. Are we one that gives generously or are we one that goes all out and gives sacrificially? I know that for me a lot of my life has been lived through the lens of just generosity, more than the lens of sacrifice. This is an area I know the Lord desires to grow me in. Whether it’s with finances or my time, I know that the Lord desires to conform me more into the image of His Son, Jesus. Because the more I look like Christ the more my giving should look like a sacrifice.

I know that for us, as Americans, we have a hard time with this because we want to be comfortable. We want our cushion in the bank account. We want everything to be taken care of. In a sense, we want control of our lives. We want to control everything. And I know that and I feel that. As an American, that’s been ingrained in me and it’s been ingrained in us all, really. So, for us to really follow Christ’s example, and lay everything out, and to follow the example of the Philippians, and to give sacrificially like they were giving, is going to be difficult for us. But we have to do it. To follow Christ’s example, to follow the example that Paul set before us, and to follow the example of the Philippians, we have to continually pray and ask God to do that work in us. It’s something that we can’t do on our own. We can’t muster up that kind of giving. It can only come from the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Paul knew the work the Lord had done in the lives of the Philippians in the way that they ministered to him. He knew that it wasn’t only for his benefit, but it was for them as well. It was supposed to be a benefit for them—a fruit of them following Jesus and growing more and more like Christ. John MacArthur says,

“Their gift brought Paul joy, not because of his personal benefit to him, but because of its spiritual benefit to them. The principle that those who give generously will be blessed is taught repeatedly in Scripture. Solomon wrote, *‘There is one who scatters and yet increases all the more and there is one who withholds what is justly due and yet it results only in want. The generous man will prosper and he who waters will himself be watered* (Proverbs 11:24-25).’”[[94]](#footnote-94)

Paul was greatly encouraged by the work he saw the Lord doing in the Philippians and he knew that he was experiencing a work that the Lord was doing in them and through them. He was getting to experience that as a recipient and as one where he could see the work being done in them. And the Lord desires to do the same work in us and I believe He is doing that and that He will continue to do so as long as we stay fixed and focused on the Gospel. As we do this, He is faithful. He will grow us in this area just like we see in the Philippians. He will supply every need and He will take care of us just like He did with them, according to His riches and His glory in Christ Jesus. It will all be done for God, and the Father, and for His glory.

I’ve seen it in us. I’ve seen us give sacrificially as a church and as a body of believers. I’ve seen us raise money for the Lanes. I’ve seen us raise money for Blue and Britt. We’ve raised money for Gulzar. I’ve seen the fruit of what God is doing in this body and I have confidence that He is going to continue to grow us.

There was a group here this weekend and I was talking to one of the leaders. He was talking about how cool it is to see what God is doing in the small town of Andrews, North Carolina. Not just with camp but also with the church. Because, believe it or not, there are a lot of people who keep up with what’s going on at Red Oak. There are a lot of people who will be listening to this podcast right here. There are a lot of people who look at our updates and who see what we are doing. There are a lot of people being encouraged and challenged by what God is doing here in this small community of believers. And I know that the Lord is only going to increase what He is doing here. I have confidence in that and it will be, just like I said, for God and for His glory.

Verses 21-23, Paul ends,

“Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. 22 All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

Here in these last verses, Paul is exhorting the Philippians to continue to encourage one another and to continue to point one another to the Gospel. He also desires to link believers from all over through the bond that they have in Christ. It’s also cool to see Paul mention Caesar’s household here. Spencer and I were talking about this earlier this week, and how funny it is that Paul gives a little wink to the Philippians and points out the irony of the situation he was in; that Caesar is the one who had Paul thrown into prison in the first place. But Paul points out, through this little nod, who was finally in charge and how God works.

In closing tonight, and as we finish out this book of Philippians as a church, I think it is important for us to look back and remember some of the major themes from this book and look at what we’ve been through together and what we have seen and what we have learned.

* First of all, I want us to remember Paul’s affection for the Philippians and how we are called to do the same to one another and have these same affections.
* Second, we need to remember to stand firm amid persecution and live a life worthy of the Gospel.
* Number three, we need to remember to be united by humility and follow the example of Christ.
* Number four, remember to be a light in a dark world.
* Number five, remember to fight against legalism and lawlessness in your own life and in others.
* Number six, remember to not be anxious but be thankful for the grace of Jesus.

Remember these truths continually, and as Spencer mentioned last week, preach these truths to yourselves over, and over, and over. Preach these truths to others in this body and in this community, and all over, wherever you go, and point them to the Gospel, and proclaim the Gospel to everyone everywhere.

I love you, church, and I’m thankful for what we are going through together. I’m thankful for the fruit that I see in you and what God is doing through you. And I’m thankful for what we’ve learned and continue to go back to it. Just like I began tonight, I think it was twelve or thirteen years ago when the Lord took me through this book for the first time. He continues to take me back time, after time, after time. Prayerfully, He will do the same for you.

Let’s pray.

Lord, I love you. I thank you for loving us. I thank you for your Son, Jesus. I thank you for the blood that was shed to rescue us from sin and darkness. I pray that this will be a message that we will proclaim with our lives and through our lips for the rest of our lives. Lord, I thank you for the book of Philippians. I thank you for your Word. I thank you for how you continually speak to us and how you are a good Father to us. If there is any time that we don’t feel like we are hearing from you, it is always going to be our fault, because you are always speaking to us. You are never silent. All we have to do is pick up your Word and we can hear from you. I pray that we would be a body of believers that continually does this. That any answers we are looking for that we wouldn’t go to the world, or that we wouldn’t rely on our flesh or our emotions, because those things will lie to us. I pray, Father, that we would continue to come back time, after time, after time to your Word, and that we would stand on that truth, because it is the only thing we can trust in. You are the only one we can trust in. Father, I know that I can’t even trust myself, but I can trust you, and I can trust your Word. I pray that we would continually be a body of believers that does that. Thank you again for the words that you penned through Paul. I thank you for what I’ve learned and I thank you for what you’ve taught us. Lord, may we be ushered into another time of worship right now. Father, I pray for those who are still running from you, that you would draw them back right now. I pray that you would bring them by the work of your Holy Spirit to a place of repentance, and that they would run to you, Father, and crawl up in your lap, and ask for help, and reach out for help, because you will do it. You will rescue us, you will grow us, and you will sanctify us. I thank you for that. Lord, we love you and we praise you. It’s in Jesus’ precious and holy name we pray, Amen.

1. The Echelon Team: <http://www.echelon-africa.com/about/our-team/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2 Timothy 4:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. You can download a free e-book about Adoniram Judson, by John Piper, here: <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/adoniram-judson-biography-free-ebook> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A brief biography of William Carey, by *Christianity Today*: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/missionaries/william-carey.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. There is a large area of the Samothrace Temple Complex, known as the Sanctuary of the Great Gods, a place of pagan worship, still remaining at Samothrace. The famous sculpture, Winged Victory, created to honor the goddess, Nike, was uncovered at Samothrace. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://humantouchofchemistry.com/tyrian-purple-the-colour-of-kings.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A video on extracting madder root dye: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqanCPHA528> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A brief description of one of the prisons where Paul was held: <https://www.insight.org/resources/article-library/individual/doing-time-in-a-first-century-prison> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Rapske, Brian. Google Books, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting, Volume 3, Paul in Roman Custody*, pp 126-127; <http://bit.ly/2aiWZKk> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <http://www.redoak-church.com/#/podcasts>; 6/26/2016; James 5:1-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Luke 14:28 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Merida, Chan, Platt, & Akin. Exalting Jesus in Philippians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) Paperback; Holman Reference, 2016. Also, <http://www.christcenteredexposition.com/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Scripture Memory Schedule: Week 1 Phil 1:6; Week 2 Phil 1:9-11; Week 3 Phil 1:21; Week 4 Phil 1:27; Week 5 Phil 2:1-2; Week 6 Phil 2:3-4; Week 7 Phil 2:14; Week 8 Phil 3:8; Week 9 Phil 3:14; Week 10 Phil 4:6-7; Week 11 Phil 4:19; Week 12 Phil 4:23 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <http://www.redoak-church.com/#/podcasts> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <http://www.ussoccer.com/us-under20-womens-national-team/latest-roster#tab-1> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Acts 2:47, 5:14, 11:24 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Acts 17:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. We came across this resource and haven’t read it thoroughly enough to recommend it for accuracy, but it covers the subject: Rapske, Brian; *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody*; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Sep 24, 2004. Also, Google Books @ <http://bit.ly/2amoLog> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. 1 Corinthians 6:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. “…but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. “…but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. “But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. “To an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Names and places have been changed or omitted for security reasons. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Oliver Gatten had a job that took him away from his family for months at a time. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters is a high-adventure Christian camp that “exists to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the exposition of Scripture and personal relationships in order to equip the Church to impact this generation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Red Oak Church has some missionaries who are in politically and spiritually sensitive areas around the world. For security reasons, in this message, \*\*\* denotes some of these people and places. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Hawthorne, Gerald and Martin, Ralph; Word Biblical Commentary (Book 43), Philippians; Zondervan; Revised edition, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The tetragrammaton (from Greek Τετραγράμματον, meaning "[consisting of] four letters",) is the Hebrew theonym יהוה, commonly transliterated into Latin letters as YHWH. It is one of the names of God used in the Hebrew Bible. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Jason Derreberry is an EMT that works part-time for Snowbird and who works and lives nearby Spencer and his family. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The Nantahala River is a river in western North Carolina in the United States, within the Nantahala National Forest, and near the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters takes campers whitewater rafting on the Nantahala River, just a few miles from the camp. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Boice, James Montgomery. Expositional Commentary (Philippians); Baker Books, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. NBA Cleveland Cavaliers forward, LeBron James, on June 15, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *The Wondrous Cross* (Chris Tomlin and Matt Redman) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qC1IllbwX4w> [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The word “yearn” in Philippians 1:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Tony Merida (Author, Editor), Francis Chan (Author), David Platt (Editor), Dr. Daniel L. Akin (Editor) *Exalting Jesus in Philippians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary*); Holman Reference, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Romans 1:!6 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Nerō Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus was Roman Emperor from 54 to 68AD. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ripken, Nik. *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected*; B&H Books; 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ripken, Nik; Lewis, Gregg (2013-12-02). The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected (p. 231). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Galatians 1:6-17 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Acts 14:19-23 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Hebrews 12:12 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Genesis 50:20 [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Matthew 26:36-56 [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Hendricksen, William and Kistemaker, Simon J. *New Testament Commentary*, set 12 volumes. Baker Academic, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid. Philippians volume, p. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Boice, James Montgomery. *Philippians Exegetical Commentary*, Baker Books, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ephesians 6:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Tannerite is the brand name of a binary explosive marketed primarily for making exploding targets for firearms practice. It is a patented combination of ammonium nitrate and aluminum powder. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. The Holman Christian Standard Bible reads, “Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit…” [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Mark 10:45 [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Merida, Chan, & Platt*; Exalting Jesus in Philippians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary*); Holman Reference, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Psalm 8:4-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Revelation 1:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Mark 10:35-45 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Mark 10:43 [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Acts 1:12-14 [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. *Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane,* painting by Heinrich Hofmann, 1890. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Luke 22:19, Matthew 26:26 [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. John 18:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Luke 22:42 [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Isaiah 53:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Matthew 26:53 [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Deuteronomy 21:23 [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Matthew 27:46 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Proverbs 3:34 [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Deuteronomy 21:23, Galatians 3:13 [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Hawthorne, Gerald; Martin, Ralph. Philipp*ians, Revised Edition (Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 43),* Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Matthew 23:10-12 (KJV) [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Deuteronomy 29:29, *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Revelation 19:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Colossians 3:23-24 [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. The students that Spencer teaches in a program called Old School at Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters. Old School is a semester-long wilderness course filled with solid outdoor skill training and biblical discipleship. <http://www.swoutfitters.com/wilderness-semester/> [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. The full text of Chalmers’ essay, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*: <http://bit.ly/20QouJC> [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Romans 8:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Psalm 115:3, 135:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Galatians 2:20 [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Boone & Crockett is a scoring method for the size of a deer’s antler rack: <http://www.boone-crockett.org/bgRecords/bc_scoring_typwhitetail.asp?area=bgRecords&type=Typical+Whitetail+Deer> [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. How to score an American Elk: <http://www.boone-crockett.org/bgRecords/bc_scoring_typicalelk.asp?area=bgRecords&type=Typical+American+Elk> [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. World hunger statistics: <http://www.worldhunger.org/2015-world-hunger-and-poverty-facts-and-statistics/> [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Military awards for valor: <http://www.americanvalor.net/medals> [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Pinwheel is a tutoring program that Red Oak Church provides for needy children in a local school. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Mebrahtom "Meb" Keflezighi; born May 5, 1975, is an Eritrean-born American long distance runner. He is the 2004 Olympic silver medalist in the marathon and finished in fourth place in the 2012 Summer Olympics. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmDy5Q3jI_A> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42A1mCHLflg> [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. *American Ninja Warrior* is a sports entertainment competition that features hundreds of competitors attempting to complete a series of obstacle courses of increasing difficulty trying to make it to the national finals. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. OLD School is under the umbrella of Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters ([www.swoutfitters.com](http://www.swoutfitters.com)). The Outdoor Leadership and Discipleship School is a semester-long wilderness program designed for college-age students who know Christ and desire to go deeper in their relationship with Him. Our mission is to point young adults toward Christ Jesus, using the tool of wilderness training and the vehicle of relational discipleship. <http://www.swoutfitters.com/wilderness-semester/description/> [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Matthew 6:27, Luke 12:25 [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Hawthorne, Gerald & Martin, Ralph; Philippians, Revised Edition (Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 43); Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. 2 Apol. 2.13 [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. A peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC or PIC line), less commonly called a percutaneous indwelling central catheter, is a form of intravenous access that can be used for a prolonged period of time. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. MacArthur, John. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Philippians; Moody Publishers, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)