

Discussion Notes
Philippians 2. 12-18
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Welcome.
I'm not Ryan Bedwell.

Last Week

- We looked at one of the most splendid passages in the entire New Testament that deals with how God shows us who he is through Jesus and how that changed the ancient world.
- We asked the question: what lies at the heart of the gospel?
- This attitude of Jesus', this selfless love, is what changed the ancient world and is what gave us much of what we value in the modern world today.
- Compassion was not at the heart of the ancient world, it was not smiled upon. But it is was at the heart of Israel's story and God's heart toward them. This means that in the Judeo-Christian story we don't find a God full of humble grace.
- It also means that as people who live out of this story we don't give people what they deserve, we give them what they need. That's Godly compassion.
- And really, we considered last week, this is the kind of world we want to live in! The last person you want in power is someone driven by ego, control and selfishness. That's not Jesus – God among his people.
- And if Jesus, truly God among us, didn't make demands but served us, how are we to live? We who are equals don't use this equality in Christ to exploit one another, but to encourage one another. We don't make demands, we serve.
- We also talked about suffering under persecution. The Christian suffers because we'd rather suffer than make someone else suffer. "We don't show up with swords or AK47s, we show up with kindness", because that's what Jesus did and that's who God is.

- Out of this grand, totally different vision of God than folks are used to, Paul then transitions into what we're looking at today – Philippians 2. 12-18

This stuff lives in the real world

- It is so easy to esteem Jesus and be amazed at the glory of the passage we looked at last week – to be enamored with the high Christology, the brilliant writing, one of the most interesting and studied passages in the whole Bible, to be overwhelmed by a vision of a humble God that transformed the world – and then come crashing down into the world of customer service, traffic, marriage, parenting, dorm life or workplace, and somehow Jesus' way goes right out the window!
- I think this is why Paul writes the way he does here – why he moves from such magnificent theology right into regular, every day stuff. It's not a choppy transition – this is what theology really is and it must hit the ground running.

2. 12 Therefore, 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,

- First of all, notice the appeal – “beloved”. Paul's heart is full of God, full of compassion and kindness. He always appeals to his friends, not out of some strong-armed authority, but love.
- It is even more important to follow in Jesus' way now Paul's gone, than when he was around. Why?
- This kind of living, Paul says, is going to take intention. So Paul says to “work out” your salvation with “fear and trembling”. Now, isn't Paul the “believe in faith and you shall be saved”, guy? Grace by faith alone? This how we typically understand Paul, especially in Romans.
- Absolutely, but he certainly agrees with James also that real relationship with God must produce results in our character.

- “There is a difference between working for and working out” Ryan Bedwell.
- If we really know this Jesus, we’ll begin to look like him. And we better believe that the cross took intention for Jesus. Humility can be hard. There will be work involved. Not work to earn grace, but work in expressing it.
- So Paul says, essentially, exemplify what you believe.
- “fear and trembling”, this might trip some of us up. One writer has helpful words on this, saying that translating fear to simple “reverence” is too weak, but the word “fear” in our modern ears is also misleading. Tim Keller describes it this way, it’s one angle, but helpful:
 - *“Fear” in the Bible means to be overwhelmed, to be controlled by something. To fear the Lord is to be overwhelmed with wonder before the greatness of God and his love. It means that, because of his bright holiness and magnificent love, you find him “fearfully beautiful”. That is why the more we experience God’s grace and forgiveness, the more we experience a trembling awe and wonder before the greatness of all that he has done for us. Fearing him means bowing before him out of amazement at his glory and beauty....What is it that motivates and moves you? Is it the desire for success? The pursuit of some achievement? The need to prove yourself to your parents? The need for respect from your peers? Are you largely driven by anger against some one or some people who have wronged you? Paul says that if any of these things are a greater controlling influence on you than the reality of God’s love for you, you will not be in a position to serve others unselfishly. Only out of the fear of the Lord Jesus will we be liberated to serve one another. (Keller, Meaning of Marriage, p.68)*
- The fear of the Lord is an awareness of how great God is and how low he stooped to serve us - and living under the gravity of that truth.
- The fear of Lord is standing at the foot of the cross, made of the very particles God dreamt up before time began, looking up and being filled with awe and humility.

- Paul says, express God's love in the shadow of God's love.

13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

- In the same breath that Paul instructs them to work out and express their relationship with God, he reminds them of God's absolute centrality to this process.
- Work it out, but remember that you're not doing this by your own merit or strength, but it is God who works in your inner life, so you can express this outer reality.
- As we incline ourselves to serve like Jesus, he is already doing the real work in us by his Spirit to enable us to do so.
- That means we can work, because God's at work. That means we can love, because he first loved us, and still loves us.
- Some translations read, "God is giving you the desire and the power" to do what pleases him.
- Paul says that God's not only going to give you the ability to live like Jesus, but he will actually soften and mold your will or desires, your heart, to be more like Jesus' heart.
- So we only end up looking like Jesus in action on the outside, because he renews us on the inside. So the "working out" isn't a "fake it till you make it" kind of thing, it's the genuine article.
- What does this look like? Paul tells us plainly, because we need to hear it.
- From grand vision of Jesus, to an explanation of the spiritual work of the inner life, right into this...

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,

- Complaining, grumbling, arguing, might seem like a normative way to live because that's what we're surrounded by, but Paul's instruction is to live opposite to that, living obviously different from what's widely accepted.
- The central reality of the universe, of God's true life, is selfless love. That's why Paul uses the words "crooked and twisted generation". When we're selfish and demand our own way, we're crooked, twisted, we've got it wrong - we're living against the grain of God's reality. As we said a couple of weeks ago, in violation of our own nature.
- But when we don't, when we live like Jesus, we are lights in the darkness. In John he first said "I am the light the world", and later to his friends, "You are the light of the world."
- Complaining and arguing is unattractive because it's of the darkness, not the light. It's opposite to God's nature. So when we complain and argue (with the intent of getting our way over someone else) it's unappealing.
- So Paul calls it out plainly, because the Philippians are just like us and need to hear it plainly – don't argue or complain amongst one another, because that's not the heart of God and you're his children, so remember that.
- Paul's concerned about unity in the Philippians church. He's already told them to stick together with one mind, in one spirit, and avoiding grumbling and complaining will help. This is a communal appeal, most obviously directed to those doing Christian life together. Its imperative the peace and humble love of God is evident within the church in Philippi, or the gospel won't spread beyond it.
- But what about fairness? An obsession of our time. What about when we *deserve* to get our own way? What about our ideas of justice, personally (and we are talking personally here. Paul isn't writing about governmental policy or social justice, he's talking about everyday Christians living and working together). What happens when I'm right, my brother or sister is wrong, and things just aren't fair, and I *should* get my own way?

- Well, in view of the cross, Paul would say, God doesn't relate to us based on fairness. This is a grace-reality. Not a fairness-reality. And I'd rather God deal with my according to his grace, not my screwed up ideas of fairness.
- That's why Jesus' tells the story of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18.21-35), because our ideas of fairness are so twisted, we can't (to mix in another parable) see the plank in our own eye to pull out the spec in our neighbor's. Even our ideas about fairness are unfair.
- So we don't grumble, complain or in-fight because we live on the foundation of grace, not fairness. Of love, not selfishness.
- It might seem that it's just a little bit of complaining is okay, or that shouting someone down is the best way to move the project forward, but Paul knows that at the heart of these actions is not God, James calls it disorderly, evil even demonic.
- This attitude will kill us in the end, and it needs to be replaced by a new attitude which remembers that even if don't get my own way, I've got more than enough to live on from Jesus.

***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. **17** Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. **18** Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.*

- The "word of life" - this is Jesus and his gospel. This is not about being good or being bad, but about living or dying. About being people of life or people of death, and this will result in us being people who grumble and fight, or people who encourage and harmonize. Anything other than Jesus' attitude will bring death, Paul says hold onto the word that brings life.
- This language of being "poured out" sounds a lot like the language we heard in the previous passage. Jesus poured himself out for the good of the cosmos,

and Paul's doing the same for the Philippians – a loving, pleasing offering to God. They've got life because Paul has given his.

- When we live this way, there is this reciprocal encouragement, like an encouragement loop. Love is shown, and love is given back and passed on, bringing encouragement to everyone involved.
- There's a wonderful synergy of love and joy in Christian community when we follow one another's lead in this way.

Questions

- When have I acted out Jesus' attitude of selfless love this week? When have I not?
- How does God want to take this from "up here" to "down here" for me?

Invite God to develop your inner life. Ask God to show you his love and care for you, and to experience the gravity of the gospel. Invite God to work in you, and ask him to help you express this same love to others. Write down things you might do or stop doing.