



OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

THRIVING AMID THE THREATS

THRIVING WHEN THE POWERFUL OPPOSE YOU

FEBRUARY 5-12, 2017

INFORMATION

Valentino's Dessert Café

Friday, February 10 (6:00-9:00pm)

Plan a date night with your sweetheart, growth group, or the entire family! Invite your friends and neighbours for a relaxed evening out. Decadent desserts and specialty coffees will be available for purchase, served by our Sr. High youth. (Sign up at the Event Registration Kiosk to donate desserts or items needed).

Stand Up Cafe

Sunday, February 12 (After each service)

Once again we are opening up the taps on the espresso maker and inviting you to stay after each service to enjoy a free latte and the opportunity to meet some new people. The coffee is free, and the encounters may just change your life.

Family Focus Day Sunday, February 19 @ 11am (one service only)

Join us for a special service designed for the entire family, with a "kid-friendly" focus you won't want to miss! No Sunday School or pre-school classes, but nursery will be provided for children under 3.

The service will revolve around J. Warner Wallace's newest book *Cold-Case Christianity for KIDS*. Special music, a dramatic performance, prizes and games- this is a Family Day event for the whole gang.

Join the adventure when our police academy cadets put their detective skills to the test on the world's oldest cold case- the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Both adult and kid versions of J. Warner Wallace's book *Cold Case Christianity* will be for sale at the event.

COACHES' CORNER

I must admit to you that I am worried. I fear that our entire society is suffering from relational damage and brain damage due to our over use of technology. It has been said that we have more people than ever before in our virtual worlds, but our face to face worlds are empty of valuable relationships. That's one more reason why the church can succeed when other institutions will fail. We teach healthy relationships, and create opportunities for them to flourish. BUT—it isn't going to happen without our diligent efforts. Have you noticed, too, that your group people now bring their Bibles as an app on their phone? What a great tool—we can have God's word with us everywhere we go. But that same device also has text messages, social media, email, the news, and dozens of other distractions built into it. I fear for the damage it is having on my life, and the lives of those I love. We just can't focus on what matters any more.

That's why I am now asking the people in my group to bring a paper Bible to group. I ask the host of the evening to put a bowl in the middle of the table. We place our phones in the bowl. They are there for us to look at, to smell, to see, and even to wonder about—but our addicted brains get a break, one

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that takes us into God's word, and into one another's lives. I am proud of my phone free group. I hope it makes a difference. I encourage you to try it.

SERMON OUTLINE

Thriving When the Powerful Oppose You Acts 5:17-42

**A Tale of Two Kingdoms:
Life Lessons for Loyal Servants in the Kingdom of God.**

1. A Kingdom of Safety ... or ... a Kingdom with a Mission
2. A Kingdom of Guilt ... or ... a Kingdom with a Message
3. A Kingdom in Rebellion ... or ... a Kingdom of Reconciliation
4. A Kingdom honored by the World ... or ... a Kingdom honored by God

**Living for the Kingdom of God turns Suffering for his Cause into a
cherished Badge of honor**

What do I need to do with what I have heard today?

MAIN POINT

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Organized persecution is inevitable and is met with patient faithfulness to Jesus' mission.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. Are you a person who is easily frazzled? For example: When things don't go your way, do you make the best of it or do you let it get to you?

2. What daily task is most difficult for you to do without complaining or arguing? Why? When do you most often find yourself grumbling in your relationship with God?

Leader: We all find certain aspects of the Christian life difficult and demanding. We can be tempted to complain about or give up on the things that challenge us. If we aren't careful, we can lose our sense of wonder and joy in serving Christ. Paul didn't advocate passivity when the Christian life gets hard. He taught that God works in believers, and believers actively work. Because of God's grace in our lives, we can pursue our calling with gladness and joy, even in the face of persecution.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13.

3. One of the ways the powerful opposed the early church was to take away their key leaders. What did Paul encourage the Philippians to do even though he was not present with them? Do you struggle in your faith when you find yourself without leadership or direction? What should you do in those moments?

4. What do you think it means to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (v. 12)? Look again at verse 13. What are the differences in how we work out our salvation and how God works in and through us?

Leader: Though Paul was not present, he instructed the Philippian church to diligently work out their salvation. It is important to note this is not the same as earning salvation by works (Eph. 2:9). “Working out your salvation” refers to pursuing spiritual growth by

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being completely devoted to Christ. Like the believers in Acts, we continue in ordinary faithfulness as we allow our relationship with Jesus and our commitment to His mission to inform the way we live every day.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:14-18.

5. A natural response to being opposed or pressed in on by the world is to complain and become argumentative in how we respond, although that is not the Christlike response (Matt. 5:38-42). How do you see this tendency in your day-to-day life? Has something specific made you feel this way recently?

6. To “shine . . . like stars” means to stand apart for God in the darkness. How does Paul tell us we can live this way? What does this mean for us in 2017 in Canada? Look back at Philippians 2:5-11 for more insight.

Leader: The Philippian Christians lived in a culture that was hostile to them and to their faith. However, that did not give them license to grumble or argue. Those types of behaviors demonstrate that the world has rattled us and ultimately show a lack of joy in Jesus. Shining like stars—being distinct with a rich and full joy—shows the world the glory of the God we serve. Life was not easy for the Philippians, but it was joyful. Oppression cannot take away joy found in Christ.

7. What was it about service and sacrifice that brought Paul joy? What part does our focus on service play in living a life of joy?

8. How does someone else’s suffering affect you? Is suffering with them a part of your response? Why would Paul expect them to rejoice with Him in suffering?

Leader: Following Jesus costs us something, namely our lives. Paul gave away his rights and his ability to determine the course of his own life, but he did it with great satisfaction and joy because he knew that the Lord was pleased with his offering. The joy in Christian service, even in opposition, is the comfort that comes from knowing that God is pleased with you in Christ. Our labor is not in vain, even if the fruit of our labor may not be seen on this side of heaven.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

9. Contagious joy was a hallmark of the early church as described in Acts. What, if

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any, obstacles to joy have you faced recently? What truth about God or His purposes for us do you need to claim?

10. Why is a commitment to spiritual growth necessary if we want to live the way Paul calls us to in these verses? What role does our growth group play in helping us?

11. Paul challenged the Philippian Christians to live in a way that their faith in Jesus was evident to people who watched their lives. Can people say the same thing about you? What really sets us apart as Christians?

PRAYER

Thank God for a hope that is not dependent upon circumstances, but is rooted in the joy to be found in serving Christ. Pray that you would take this joy with you into your daily lives as you are being renewed by the Spirit of God in your service to Christ's mission.

MEMORIZE

¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe – Philippians 2:14-15

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

In 2:12 Paul continued his practical exhortation on how the Philippians were to live—whether in his presence or in his absence. Paul had just shown the depth of Jesus' obedience (2:5-11), and it is that same level of obedience that believers are to exhibit. Obedience to Christ is the primary responsibility of the church, and it is a critical component of the Christian life. The humility and obedience we see in Jesus Christ is to be a factor on our own lives. How are we to show obedience? The command is to work out your own salvation. When we work out our salvation, we are taking the salvation God's given us and strengthening it through spiritual growth.

We cannot work out our salvation without God's intervention. There is human responsibility, but there is also divine empowerment. It is a partnership. We work out our salvation with a serious realization that God is working in us. The word for God's working refers to an energizing work that is always effective. When God works, He succeeds and enables us to act. God places the desire

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within us to be obedient, and then He leads us to do it. When we are obedient, we are true to God's purpose. We carry out His will, and the purpose behind His will is to bring glory to Himself. God enables us to work out our salvation, and the way we work it out is to bring praise and glory to the One who gave it to us.

Paul called the Philippians to do everything—all aspects of working out their own salvation—without grumbling and arguing (v. 14). When we are working for God's purpose and His glory, it's difficult to be self-centered. Yet self-centeredness and pride enter into our spiritual progress leading us away from unity with God.

When we live as Paul described, we are seen as blameless and pure (v. 15). Our lives are to be pure—unadulterated with the things of the world. Our lives are to be of such purity that no one can blame us or find fault with anything in our lives. We already are children of God, but we are to live like children of God. The faultlessness of believers is contrasted with the world of non-believers, which is characterized by Paul as a crooked and perverted generation. This generation is crooked in that it has turned away from the truth. Perverted is an even stronger word and carries the idea that it has twisted and distorted the truth. The contrast is so sharp between the two groups that it can be compared to the difference between light and darkness. In the midst of the moral darkness around us, we shine like stars in the world. Even with our imperfections, we still serve as a light to a world in darkness. We shine—we are seen—and we point to Christ.

Christians always ought to live in such a way as to present a vivid contrast to the world in which they live (v. 16). The word translated hold firmly indicates that Paul desired his readers to be beacons of truth to those pagans among whom they lived. By their lives, the Philippians were to demonstrate that they were holding fast to the gospel.

Paul's words in verse 17 indicate that he was aware of the very real possibility that he would suffer martyrdom for the cause of Christ. He referred to the possibility of such a death in sacrificial terms. Paul then invited his readers to reciprocate by rejoicing with him in light of his possible martyrdom (v. 18). Rather than being sad at the prospect of his death, Paul urged them to rejoice with him.