



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to everyone

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“Jesus, The Model Man” Philippians 2:1-13 Series: *Philippians for Friendship* --The Lord’s Supper—

Welcome to Part 3 of our series, “Philippians for Friendship”, our study of Paul’s warm letter to Christians in the Greek city of Philippi. We’re going to march into chapter 2 today, and you might want to get your Bible ready by finding Philippians 2. As I recap what we discovered so far, you can scan the text in chapter 1.

The writer is Paul, dictating from a prison cell probably in Rome, probably about A.D. 61 or 62. Paul had addressed this, “to all the saints who are in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with presbyters and deacons”. “Presbyters” can be translated as “elders”, “overseers” or “bishops”. Our “Presbyterian” denomination gets its name from this—we are a church run by elders. Without any further delay, Paul begins (as he does in many letters) with a whole section of thanksgiving, gratitude and praise. He reaffirms his affection for these particular people.

Though Paul was pleased to be able to report that even in chains there in Rome, the good news about Jesus continued to penetrate the world. Everyone in that prison had heard Paul was in chains there because of Jesus. And further, as Christians from Rome had come to visit him and bring him a lot of what he needed (since the Empire did not feed its prisoners), these Christians had come away inspired with a new desire to tell others about Jesus, also. This gave Paul a deep sense of fulfillment.

And perhaps that was especially important now, because Paul had come to sense that he was near the end, that perhaps he would not be making it out alive. And he was OK with that. In fact, he was *more* than OK with that, for “to live is Christ, and to die is gain,” he wrote. In other words, as he lived, Paul had such a communion with Christ—that’s what it means to be “in Christ”, as he often wrote—that whether he lived or died, he couldn’t lose. Either way, he wins! And hearing this, last week, we felt convicted—how little communion most of us have with Christ, how little we have of God in our lives. Many of you do not really think it is even possible.

With chapter 2 now, Paul begins to focus his letter more on them, his addressees in Philippi who are “in Christ Jesus”. Listen with me for God’s Word **TO US TODAY**, as I read these verses aloud. [*Text*]

We’re going to follow the text closely this morning, so your open Bibles will help you see how the parts fit in context. Verse 1: If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, . . .” This is a loooong sentence in the original Greek, and it’s not over yet. Paul has set up an if/then construction. If you have any of these things, **THEN . . .** (and in a moment

he'll tell us what to do with them). The word the NIV translates as "encouragement" is from the root, *parakaleo*, which is the word we find in the Bible describing the Holy Spirit. Literally it means, "coming alongside you" in a time of trouble. Do you feel the Spirit's presence when you turn to God, ask, and wait? There is hardly anything in the world more encouraging than that!

Dave Eubank, the founder of the Free Burma Rangers, gave testimony to that a couple of times during his talk that several of us attended this past Thursday in Sacramento. He spoke of some of his Burmese leaders meeting together, and they all asked God in prayer what they should do. All the leaders got the same word from the Lord. That was strong confirmation—encouragement—that they were indeed hearing God's Voice. They did what God asked, and God provided success in a dangerous situation. To sense the leading of God's Spirit brings huge encouragement. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit. Do you listen? Have you grown rusty about hearing from God, or did you think only "the hired holy man" hears from God? (That's the way 'cults' work, isn't it?) No, all who are in Christ can learn to hear from God.

Another word in this verse is suggestive. Got "fellowship?" Paul asks. That word is "koinonia", the Greek word for a group that lives out the "Acts 2 lifestyle", where people "have each others' backs", we might say. Do you have some people in your life who you know you can count on in trouble?

In short, if you have a living connection with God, you support each other openly, and if you have any fondness for me, then—verse 2—"make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." And how do we do *that*? A negative example and a positive example (verses 3 and 4)—"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit [that's the negative], but in humility, consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

In verses 5-11, Paul launches into his deepest desire for his friends at Philippi—and no surprise, it has everything to do with Jesus. In your Bible, is this section set off in quotes, or is it indented? That's a way to show that we think Paul was quoting from an early song about Jesus, something that people would know, perhaps, already.

Let's dig in. First, Jesus is God. Paul is not telling his Philippian friends anything they don't believe; he doesn't argue for this, or make a case for this (as he does very well in other writings). Jesus is God—but unlike we who hold on tightly to what we have, Jesus did not even want to hold on to "godness". He was very willing to let go of divinity—to hang it up, is how I think of it. He "made himself nothing". The Greek word is, "kenosis". Jesus is "emptying himself". Jesus is going down, down, down—something we might say was "humiliating himself", because our pride would make this really hard to do.

First, he hangs up his divinity, second, he takes the form of a servant. Remember the trend of some years ago about "past lives", as if people were reincarnated to live again and again? I was fascinated to see that when these "true believers" were asked about this, they always had someone unusual in their "personal family tree"—someone famous or some scoundrel, a princess or a pirate. Of all the people who claimed to have had past lives, no one seemed to have had purely ordinary lives. Sorry—that stretches credibility too far, for me. By contrast, Jesus did not have any secret wish to be someone famous, but willingly became a servant.

After this second “humiliation” of becoming a servant, he humbles himself yet again, obediently going to death in a humiliating way—hung out naked in public, tortured and beaten to a pulp, trusting his ministry would go on without him. Down, down, down—Jesus becomes less, and less, and less—for us!

Then there’s that little word “therefore”. It’s a pivot point that turns everything he’s said to point toward what comes next. Because of this selflessness, his willingness to be humiliated even to death, God lifted Jesus to the highest place. The one “who was nothing” is now “everything”, and a day is coming when the very name of Jesus will cause every knee to bow throughout the universe—in heaven, and on earth, and even under the earth. In heaven, in hell and on earth among mortals. Because every creature will know Jesus Christ is Absolute Ruler—he has put on again his robe of divinity—and Jesus will be forever “exhibit A” of the glory of God the Father.

The writer of Hebrews has a similar line—“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Hebrews 12:2-3, NIV) Sometime when we have that as a text before us, I want to play a song by Noel Paul Stookey, “For the Love of It All”. God’s love for us is beyond our ability to understand. For you, for me, Jesus did all this! Praise God!

In light of this bedrock truth captured in the old Christ hymn he quotes, Paul urges his people to move ahead in their life “in Christ”. Verses 12 and 13: “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

“Continue to work out your salvation, friends.” Salvation is a process. That’s not what many of us believed. We were taught that when we raised our hand at the rally, or went forward at the revival to “give our lives to Christ”, that we were saved or “born again” in the language Jesus uses in John 3. But what do we call a baby who never grows past birth? We worry about such a child; we apply every medical effort we can think of to remove whatever barrier is blocking that growth, because we know the baby will die. The rule of all nature is, “grow, or die”. How much have you grown since you gave your life to Jesus as Lord? Were you born again (or, born from above), or were you “stillborn”?

Work it out—grow it up—your salvation. The word for salvation is the word for “wholeness” and “health”. Just as we must exercise our bodies to live vital lives, we must also exercise our relationship with God and build it up, to have a vital spiritual life.

And this is serious and exciting business, because it is the power of God we’re connected with. Like the proverbial “having a tiger by the tail”, we are not in full control of this growth process. Our partner is the Creator of the Universe, and it is not a connection between equals. No wonder we “work out our salvation with fear and trembling”!

But the good news is, “it is God [the one who loves you so much that he would die to set you right] God who works in you, to will and to act according to his good purpose”. In C.S. Lewis’ book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Jesus is pictured as a huge lion named

Aslan. One of the children asks about him, with more than a little fear. “Is Aslan safe?” “Who ever said anything about ‘safe’?” was the reply. “Aslan is not safe. But he is good.” That’s our partner in progress, Jesus the Model Man, the Lion of Judah, our Lover for Eternal Life.

How is your salvation coming?

(play, *That’s MY King* sermon portion with video)

I couldn’t have said it better, myself.

Do you know him? The model man? The Second Adam? The Savior and Leader of my life?

INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNION

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on July 5, 2009, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]