

Park Road Baptist Church 22nd August 2021

Order of Service and Sermon

Call to worship / Sword drill

Deuteronomy 7:9, Exodus 34:6, Lamentations 3:22 – 23, Romans 8:38 – 39, Psalm 119:89 – 90, Psalm 13:5 – 6.

Song He has made me glad 'I will enter his gates' (Leona Von Brethorst)

Song Father God I wonder (Ishmael)

Bring offering to the front

Prayer

Bible reading **Philippians 2:12 – 24 (Sheila Clubb)**

Song Amazing grace 'my chains are gone' (Chris Tomlin)

Song God of grace (Chris Bowater)

Sermon

(1) In January of 1996, Pastor Joe Wright, senior pastor of the 2,500-member Central Christian Church in Wichita, was invited to deliver the opening prayer at a session of the Kansas House of Representatives.

During his prayer some democrats were upset and walked out as he prayed. When he finished his prayer, 3 democrats came to the front to protest, saying **'he cannot talk about us like that.'** Within 6 weeks, Central Christian Church, where Rev. Wright is pastor, had more than 5,000 phone calls with only 47 of those calls responding negatively.

Copies of this prayer were being requested from India, Africa and Korea.

Let me read the prayer to you:

(2) "Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance.

We know Your Word says, "Woe to those who call evil good", but that is exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and inverted our values.

(3) We confess that:

We have ridiculed the absolute truth of your Word and called it pluralism.

We have worshipped other gods and called it multiculturalism.

We have endorsed perversion and called it an alternative lifestyle.

We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery.

(4) We have neglected the needy and called it self-preservation.

We have killed our unborn and called it choice.

We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem.

(5) We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression.

We have ridiculed the time-honoured values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

Search us, Oh God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free. Amen!"

I would be surprised if he is ever invited back to pray for politicians again. And yet, God has blessed this man for having the courage to speak the truth, because it's not very easy to stand up for what you believe.

And do you know what? I think the apostle Paul would have loved this prayer, because Paul's world is not that much different to the world today.

In verses 14 - 15 Paul says, ***'Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation.'***

Paul's world was crooked and depraved as is our world today. And it is against that background of a world that is crooked and depraved that Paul is going to instruct the Christians at Philippi how to live for Jesus.

(6) Okay, Paul starts this little section in verse 12 with the word, ***'therefore'*** which is always a bit of a trigger word. As someone once said, ***'when you see the word 'therefore' in the Bible, you need to ask what it's there for.'***

Well, it's a bit of a signal to stop and look back and recall the eleven verses that went before. In other words, in the light of these eleven verses that we looked at last week, this is how we are to live.

Paul is referring to Jesus who was and is fully God yet he made himself nothing and he took on the nature of a servant.

So, he leaves the glory and wonder of heaven where he is worshipped and adored and honoured and loved by the angelic hosts.

And he comes to this world here he is disrespected and despised by proud and arrogant people.

But not only did Jesus leave the glory and wonder of heaven.

Not only did Jesus make himself nothing and take the nature of a servant – but he also willingly laid down his life for you and for me on the cross.

And so, we see the humility of Jesus, his servant heart and his obedience to his Father.

And now Paul says, in the light of that or because of that, this is how you should live – and Paul is going to give us 3 instructions. (7)

Instruction number 1 – Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling (v12).

We need to remember that Paul is someone who faced lots of temptations in his life. He is in prison, and he is nearing the end of his life. He has been following Jesus for around 30 years and during that time he has been hated and despised and opposed and I'm sure there were times when he felt like giving up and giving in – and yet, what we find is that Paul is this passionate guy who keeps running the race until the Lord calls him home.

And he's writing to this church in Philippi who are tempted to lose sight of their mission and they are beginning to grumble and complain.

And so, Paul wants them to focus on Jesus and keep on going. So, he says to this church, ***'continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.'***

So, let's just take a look at that little verse because that verse has been a bit of a battleground over the centuries. It has been debated by theologians in the context of divine

sovereignty and human responsibility. It's just one of those things that's been rumbling in the background for years and years.

How much of what is going on is God and how much of what is going on is us? And people take different points of view on that argument.

I think what Paul is saying is that the Christian journey that we are on starts and finishes with God.

It's not that one day we decided to love God, but the Bible says we love him because he first loved us and this new birth and new life is just the start of the journey, isn't it?

I'm sure you have heard people give their testimony and it's all about a decision they made to follow Jesus and it's about what they were like before they followed Jesus and what they are like now. But very often they are talking about a decision that happened many years ago – and that's fine, but I think the bulk of our Christian testimony should be about what God is doing in our lives now.

The Christian life is not just about a one-off decision – that is only the start of the journey – and we are to keep on going and keep on growing.

Mark Driscoll says that divine sovereignty and human responsibility are like two pedals on a bike. I really like that and it's a good picture to hold in our minds.

God works in our lives, and we respond.

God challenges us about some sin in our lives and we turn around.

God prompts us to do something, and we do it.

God encourages us and we receive that encouragement.

That is how we grow but it is always God who takes the initiative.

He leads and we follow.

So, remember the 2 pedals on the bike – divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

We will work out our salvation as we learn to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit. (8)

Instruction number 2 – Do everything without complaining or arguing (v14).

This doesn't just apply to the times when life is great, but it also applies to those times when we feel life has dealt us a bad hand.

Another translation uses the words, '*grumbling*' and '*murmuring*'.

David Jeremiah said that the children of Israel had turned grumbling and murmuring into an Olympic sport – they were just so good at it.

He says, they murmured at the Red Sea when they saw the Egyptians coming after them.

They murmured at Moriah where the water was bitter.

They murmured in the wilderness when they had no food.

They murmured against Moses and Aaron because the spies reported the presence of giants in the land of Canaan.

What Paul is saying to the church at Philippi and to us, is, don't be like them.

Don't be the kind of people who grumble and murmur and complain.

I love this story told by Richard Dunn. Richard Dunn has written a number of books, perhaps his best-known book is called, 'Don't just stand there, pray something.'

As well as being quite a prolific author he is also the pastor of a church in Texas. He lost his son when he was just a teenager through suicide and he was just so broken by that and the

pain of that experience inspired him to write a book called, 'when heaven is silent'. And in this book, he tells a very honest story about grumbling and complaining.

About 10 miles from where he lives there is a big theme park called 6 Flags and he had been promising for some time that he would take his children to this theme park.

And so, the day arrives and they all pile into the car and head off to the theme park. They eventually get inside after waiting quite some time in the long que – and to get the whole family in it cost around \$200.

He says it was just one of those days when it was blistering hot and the que's for all the rides were so long. He said we rode the log roll 6 times and each time I was sat at the front because that's where all the water pours in.

About 6 pm he gathered all his family together and said we have all had a great time, but I have to take the service at church tomorrow, so we had better head for home.

No way, dad, it doesn't close till midnight – we've got 6 more hours.

And so very reluctantly they head back into the park where they spend another 6 hours. It was almost 1am when they arrived back at the car park.

They are driving along in the car and a couple of the children have fallen asleep. But through the quietness he begins to hear this sobbing in the back seat.

It's his daughter, Kim. He asks her 'what's the matter sweetheart.' And in her little squeaky voice, she said, you promised me a balloon, you promised me a balloon.

And then he remembered as they were going into the theme park, there was this guy selling balloons and he told her he would get her one on the way out – you don't want to be carrying a balloon around with you all day long.

And when they were leaving at midnight the guy selling balloons had long since gone home, and anyway, he had forgotten all about it.

Richard Dunn says I must tell you this happened when I was less mature than I am now.

They were approaching a layby and he slammed on the brakes at the last second and pulled in. The sudden jolting of the car woke everyone up.

He turned and said to them 'I have spent all day in this stupid theme park. I have spent more than \$200 and I have to be up in 5 hours' time to take the morning service. I did all this for you and all you can mention is that silly a little balloon that you didn't get.

Isn't that so true?

I did all of that for you and all you can think about is I didn't get a balloon.

In some ways that story is a parable of the church.

Jesus has done so much for us as we saw last week.

He left the glory of heaven and became nothing. He humbled himself by taking on the nature of a servant. He even became obedient to death – death on a cross.

And we can grumble and complain about little things – 'I don't like the songs', 'the coffee wasn't so good today', 'that's where I sit', 'why should I do it, I did it last time', 'the sermon was a bit long', 'these all-age services are not for me'..... and so it goes on and on.

Remember we said that the word, 'therefore' is a trigger word to remind us of what Paul has just said.

In the light of all that Jesus has done for us, we are to do everything without complaining or arguing or grumbling or murmuring.

Today we might use the expression, 'throwing our toys out the pram.'

Don't complain that you never got a balloon!

Okay Paul, we've got the message, we are not to complain and murmur etc but don't leave us there, because that's a pretty tough instruction.

And thankfully, Paul's not going to leave us there. (9)

His third instruction comes in verse 15, Shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.

I think Paul is saying to the church in Philippi and to the church at Park Road, ***'don't lose sight of your mission.'***

Some of you will remember the popular song

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine.

Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine.

Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine.

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

There's a lovely verse in Daniel chapter 12 that says,

'Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever' (Daniel 12:3).

Isn't that beautiful?

If you are helping people find faith in Jesus – if you are making a difference in people's lives and helping them to live a righteous life, then you are going to shine like a bright star in the night sky.

Summary

God's word to us this morning is that, in the light of all that Jesus has done for us, we are to: Work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose – remember the pedals on a bike!

Do everything without complaining or arguing or murmuring – remember what Christ has done for you.

Shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life – remember the landscape of our world is crooked and depraved.

Song Lord, the light of you love is shining (Graham Kendrick)