

The Rock: 04-18-2021

Philippians: The letter of Joy

First reading: Ephesians 4:1-3

Title: We can work it out*

Scripture: Philippians 2:12-18

Theme:

In community, as believers in Jesus, our call is to work out what God is working in us- and it is clearly done better together, united and focused.

Introduction:

In 1965, a couple of guys from Liverpool England sat down and wrote a short song with a plain and simple hook.

We can work it out, we can work it out. Now I am not entirely certain how the rest of the song can help us today with Paul and his words here in chapter two, as its more about seeing it my way verses seeing it your way.

But no worries, we can work it out, we can work it out. Do I have to keep on talking till I can't go on? Goodness, I hope not dinner will be cold, say nothing of lunch.

As we move into the scriptures though, just one more observation from Lennon and McCartney:

"Life is very short and there is no time for fussing and fighting my friend." That I sone of the main reasons the other Paul, you know the Apostle calls for unity amongst God's people.

The Story:

While the song itself seems to walk though I am right and you are wrong, the jist it seems is working out the differences in some sort of unified fashion.

Like all good analogies, there it begins to launch us, the song itself would break down and put us in a place Paul, the apostle, not the Beetle, would want us to be.

But working out our salvation, seems like, well, work. I thought last week we weren't into performance-based acceptance.

You would be right and I'm glad you were listening. We aren't, but the Bible is not a flat-line, one layered thing. It does mean what it says and says what it means.

But we have to work it out. The best way to do that is to understand that God, in Jesus, has worked in us and given us the ability as individuals and as a community to spend our lives working it out.

God can and has done all that is necessary for our salvation. Yet, it seems clear also that being more and more like Jesus is a calling to make us more active in that work of growth.

Salvation is God's gift to us because of Jesus. But how we show those around us that that is real and has happened, well that is the working out our salvation. Our becoming sanctified and more like Jesus.

It's helpful for me to remember that our salvation is immediate, but we spend our lives working it out, again becoming sanctified means remembering that because we are saved, we have been delivered from:

Sin's penalty. That we will ultimately be delivered from **sin's presence**. But while we are here in the middle, we are fighting daily against **sin's power**.

I leave it for you to look at later, but this is what Paul is getting at in Colossians three when he challenges us to

put to death daily the things of the flesh.

He then tells us to daily put on the things of Christ. He then goes on to talk about what those are. Reminding us that it is a daily battle, and sometimes we miss the mark, but that God's grace and our growth in that grace gets us through.

And no matter how many times we fall and mess up, our salvation is secure, because God makes it secure. We don't lose it when we fall, and there is never a point where you need to "get saved again" or "baptized again".

So, when Paul tells us here in
Philippians: **(REMEMBER READ SCRIPTURES SLOWLY!)**

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

-Philippians 2:12-13 ESV

We find a challenge to self-responsibility. That we have work to do in light of what God has done. No, I am not talking in circles, but looking at the challenge of Paul to know that God

wants me and you to get to work, and do so in light of the work of Jesus.

Part of that is to get into your Bibles every day. To study the life of Jesus and how we are to live not only in light of Him, but as lights in the world.

You see, for me, I have the deep privilege of teaching every Sunday morning as someone who has been called to the full-time ministry. But all I can do, is all I can do.

I think that's part of what Paul is saying here in verses 14-16, so let's look at them and walk through them:

"Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 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, 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."

-Philippians 2:14-16 ESV

He is teaching us how to live, encouraging us in community to be unified for the cause of Christ and for his joy. Nothing really any different than he teaches in all of his letters. Biblical

unity for the sake of Jesus and your community:

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

-Ephesians 4:1-3 ESV

The key to our growth is never uniformity, but rather Biblical unity. The celebrating of our differences, and at the same time celebrating that God has made us one in Christ.

Paul doesn't want to get to the finish line and find that those that God gave him didn't do their part as he had done his in this race.

We, if we are parents, understand this and teach our kids in much the same way. We teach them right and wrong. Loving them as our kids, for that never changes. They are always our kids, even when they miss the mark. (God's salvation - unearned)

We show them by how we live, our choices, and even our faith in tough times. These are all teachable moments and things.

Praying and hoping as they get older that they make the right choices in life and as a faithful follower of Jesus they grow in their understanding and faith.

Growing not only in Christ and learning/living out what the Bible teaches, but also for their success in their vocation of choice and calling.

Learning to balance how they live and make life choices in light of Jesus, the Scriptures and priorities set there.

From the very practical and truthful sense, we are all the sum total of our choices and defined priorities grow from that. This is true for all of us. While God calls and saves, we have the choice to obey and follow.

Developing a life pattern and rhythm that makes Jesus the priority, and within that, being a part of the local church and community of believers.

It seems then that out of that, in God's goodness, we become better equipped, more prepared to be good citizens, as good a worker as possible, grace-filled, and honest.

My observations here are that it actually drives us to de-compartmentalize our lives. And that is a most important and

beautiful thing. Church is not "what you do" on a given Sunday.

Why? Because you are the church, that's why. The church is a living breathing organism, made of people.

The church is not this place, although we have been blessed by it and called to meet here in order that we grow together, to learn the scriptures, and encourage each other as we go on in our everyday lives.

...blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of...

-Philippians 2:15b ESV

In the midst of.

That's why the goal and part of the vision and desire is to de-compartmentalize, not just our view on life, but on Church. Yes, we have nursery, kids church, youth group, small groups -all are vital and necessary.

But the goal isn't to create more things. Being busy doesn't equate to being productive. But rather our goal is to make life-long followers of Jesus Christ who will go in the midst of crookedness and twistedness and make a difference.

That is made so much easier if, from the littlest to the oldest, we understand that this is "my church community", and I am a valued and vital part of it.

Lynne has a saying: We want our goal to be that the kids want to be in "big church"- That's here in this room as a part of the body listening to the old guy in the front -their pastor, just like everyone else.

That's not ego, that is community.
(expand a little)

In all my years of ministry, when we silo off in that way, teaching our younger people that's it's cooler to be doing other things, and Sunday mornings in this room are boring and to be avoided, there becomes an unintended separation.

Because we never actually put it that way, but by our actions and sometimes off handed statements, we create that mind set.

All of their experiences then, as they grew, were outside of this room, sometimes with pastors who are at their church for only a couple years. These kids and teens then have no real attachment to anyone else.

In other words, they didn't feel a part, or feel as though they belonged. But they

do belong, and they did. Off to college they would go, and sometimes when they returned, they would attend.

But did they know (and this applies to every church, not just us) that this is their church? That they can and should grow into being a valued member. We are not, nor have we been for a very long time, in a culture where that can be assumed.

This is in part, one of the huge blessings of a long-term ministry in one spot. A faithful and consistent senior pastor and pastoral team builds and grows that security.

Is this the place, or do they find another where they can continue to grow as life-long followers of Jesus? That also is ok.

It is also why I fought so very hard against the cultural norm that low balled young people's ability to listen, and the sound-bite Christianity mind-set.

The culture tells us, and continues to tell us that a kid or teens attention span at best was about 6-8 minutes. Beyond that I would lose them completely and bore the snot out of them. Perhaps I did, but that had nothing to do with

their attention span, that had to do with me.

What I discovered, and continue to discover, is that (with some exceptions) our attention spans are what we want them to be. Sadly also, what we are told they are and we just accept what we are told.

How I teach now is how I taught the Bible then, and it works. I look back, only so that I can grow forward. Not to get back there, but to learn how to launch forward. Being only as smart as my last mistake quite often makes me Einstein level genius.

But there are two things that have stuck with me forever, and I recall them whenever I need to, sometime in discouragement, but more often in joy.

One is the time I was told that I had the most respectable youth group. And I can see in my mind's eye one of those last big events we had before I stepped back from youth. **(Age and toothpaste-talk about this)**

Watching some of those teens standing on the sidewalk downtown in front of city hall, talking to and encouraging every passing teen to come in and join us for a concert, pizza and candy. Relationship building and community outreach.

Blameless, innocent, shining like lights.

Then I had a mom tell me once, that when her daughter got home from youth group one Sunday night after I had taught on Esther and being born for such a time as this, she said that her daughter had learned more about Esther in that one message, and was happy and blessed.

My point I want to make this morning is that all of those students were working out their salvation, working out what God was working in and doing so within the community of youth and in the wider vibrant community of The Rock.

But even that didn't happen alone, any more than any of us can do this Christian life alone. They had, in my very biased opinion, the best group of dedicated leaders pouring into them.

All I did was teach and meet with students throughout the week. But the leaders and mentors they had made youth what it was.

They poured their hearts into those teens. Again, I look back only in order to grow forward. Holding fast the word of life as Paul says here in verse 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.”

-Philippians 2:16 ESV

So that he may be proud, proud when Jesus calls him home, or proud when Jesus comes to get him. I know that feeling very well!

Nobody wants to spend their life doing things that don't matter. EVERYTHING matters in the kingdom of God. No matter what you do- it all matters!

Especially if priority number one is to live a God honoring, Christ centered life.

Paul's like: Listen, I don't care how my life ends, I just want to be able to see you holding strong as life-long followers of Jesus.

Every time you fall down, or mess up, you don't lose your salvation. That just shows that you are working it out, you are being sanctified, justified, in Christ.

I just want to encourage you and see you get back up and get back in the game. Try again and again and again. Until Jesus comes.

In the words of Dory, that every forgetful little fish: Just keep swimming! Because we can work it out, we can work it out. For Paul says:

"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. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me."

-Philippians 2:17-18 ESV

So, let's keep on going until we can't go on. Just keep swimming!

*-Lennon and McCartney: 1965