

For the sake of time and simplicity today—because we’ve already had such a *full* service, in the sense of substance—I’m going to get right to the point.

A couple of weeks ago we looked at the ‘Christ hymn’ in Philippians chapter 2—a poetic section of verses that speak in profound detail about the humility of Christ, about Christ becoming a servant for all before He became the King before whom every knee will bow.

Do likewise, says Paul. Be of one mind with one another, yes, but do so by having the same mind as Christ. *All of you* should be looking to Him as the archetype of God-like humility.

This is the foundation for what Paul says next. Because without this fundamental understanding of who Christ is and who He has been *for* you, living out your faith will be like entering a world cup soccer match without any knowledge of how the game works. You’ll end up sitting on the bench because you won’t understand what it’s all for.

But for Paul, this salvation in Christ that you’ve been offered isn’t something to just fiddle with or watch from the sidelines. Work it out. Spend time with it. Continually do something with it.

Because God is always doing something; and you don’t want to miss it. **Read Philippians 2:12-18.**

If you’ve been following the global news scene recently, you’ll likely have been updated on how things are currently being handled in the war with Iran. At the very least, you’ve probably seen the increase in gas prices over the last number of months—and that’s in large respect because Iran has been blocking the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf where oil and gas are transported.

Now, just this last week, President Trump agreed to a series of concessions and signed an MOU with the President of Iran—in large respect because of the pressures he’s facing from his American constituents who have been growing increasingly frustrated with the impact and consequences of the war. Nothing frustrates a North American more than high gas prices.

And with the signing of this MOU, it’s become even more clear that although two world superpowers—the US and Israel—have been flexing their military muscles against the Iranian regime, reports are saying that the regime hasn’t actually been crippled at all—it’s been empowered.

And it seems to be the case that things are essentially going to go back to where they were *before* the US and Israel launched the war back in February. The Strait will once again be open for shipping, and the countries will go back to discussing a nuclear deal.

So the lingering question, then, as one BBC journalist put it, is ‘what was it all for?’ Right now, any American could ask that question. What were we doing there? For what purpose or end goal are we enduring inflation and rising costs, not even to mention the significant loss of human life?

What was it all for? It's a question that has plagued much of our human history. But it's a question that—at least in our text for today—Paul is not asking. Not even for a moment. And he's encouraging the Philippians to have that same vote of confidence.

Because he knows *exactly* what all of this is for. What his suffering and their struggles are for. He's just reminded the Philippians about the Kingdom they are a part of—and more specifically, the King who they are serving. We're not living in the consequences of a war where the outcome is unknown and uncertain.

Christ *is on the throne*. It's already happened. And it is this reality that you are now tasked to live into.

So he says this in verse 12: *“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 in order to fulfill his good purpose.”*

Work it out, he says, because you already know what it's all for. Far superior than cheap oil and gas prices, you have been offered the gift of eternal life in the presence of God through Jesus. You have been served by a Saviour who has gotten down on His knees to wash your feet and to die for you.

You have been claimed by Christ. You belong to Him—not to anyone else. That's what he's done. So live it out. Work out your salvation—says Paul. Do something with it.

Recently my son Malakai has gotten into puzzles, and often before bedtime Danny or I will sit down with him and watch as he pulls out a set of four puzzles—all colour coordinated—and one-by-one tries to piece them together, with varying levels of success depending on how loopy he is. And his brain hasn't yet developed to a point where he can look at two pieces and immediately see how they connect. But he *can* see patterns. So he can spot two or three pieces that have trees, for instance. And then it's a process to figure out how the pieces actually fit together.

He has to work it out, as if he's turning a dial. Turn it this way. Turn it the other way. Until finally the piece fits. He has to struggle with it until something clicks, and then he can move forward.

In a more spiritually significant way, that's what Paul's urging the Philippians to do. Work at it. Struggle, wrestle, sort through it. Faith is a living thing, not something stagnant.

And not just that, but Paul tells them to *“work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”* Why with fear and trembling? Because verse 13, in Jesus, it is now *God* who is working in you to will and to act.

So God isn't just in the room. He's in *you*. And He has spoken promises over you that cannot be thwarted by earthly wars and political gambling.

It's exactly what we've just celebrated in the baptism of Jilla. With the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, there is an immediate—but also gradually strengthened—*disempowerment* of other spiritual powers and regimes seeking to thwart God's purposes for her. They have no authority over her. She belongs to Christ Jesus.

So work out your salvation, says Paul. It's the calling that is now on Jilla, and it's the calling that is on each one of us. Work out this 'belonging' in Jesus. Live in a kind of fearful or reverent awe, and tremble at the reality that you have the Living God working within you.

It's something that—when we read the Old Testament—our Israelite ancestors just could not grasp. Because back in Deuteronomy, when Moses is giving the Law, he recites a song to the people. And in the song, he highlights the contrast between God, who is perfect and just and faithful, and the people who are "*corrupt and not his children; to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation.*"

Recognize the language? Why had Israel become a warped and crooked generation?

Well, if you remember their journey in the wilderness, from the moment that Israel stepped foot outside of Egypt, what were they doing? Grumbling and complaining.

Exodus 15:24 – "*So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?'*"

Exodus 16:2 – "*In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.*"

Exodus 17:2 – "*So they quarreled with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink.'*"

They complain to Aaron when Moses takes too long on the mountain. They complain about their adversity and lack of food. They complain about how difficult it looks to enter the Promised Land. Even Miriam and Aaron complain about Moses' leadership at one point.

It's as if Scripture is alerting us to the sobering reality that this is a very human thing to do—and what happens when we live apart from the Spirit of God.

So Paul says here, "*Do everything without grumbling or arguing.*" Because a person who is caught up in a spirit of discontentment and subject to grumbling and arguing gives very little power over to the Spirit of Jesus to transform their way of thinking. Not to mention the ripple effect that it has.

Don't follow in the footsteps of Israel, Paul's saying, but rather of Christ. Don't seek to mirror the polarized and argumentative generations around you or that came before you. Mirror Christ.

And then, says Paul, "*you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.*" Like an artist putting their work in a gallery, you can display what *you* have as a result of being in Jesus.

As Jesus said back in Matthew 5, “*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.*”

I know, for many of us, the idea of being ‘put on display’ sounds uncomfortable. But this isn’t about you. It’s about working out your salvation so that the light of God shines *through* you.

Remember, Paul’s overarching concern for this church is that their public witness would display their belief in Christ. That everything they do ‘out there’ would be a manifestation of their internal life together in Christ.

Which is why again, for Paul, to live or die doesn’t matter. Because he says, “*even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.*”

In other words, even if the powers-that-be deem it fitting to kill me, my very life is connected to *your* sacrifice. Because we’re in a sacrificial camaraderie together. Because our life together is an offering to God and something to rejoice in no matter what happens. Because we display Christ—yes, in our own personal lives—but even more significantly in our life together.

Because *we* are the Body of Christ. It’s all for Him. So at no point—at least from Paul’s vantage point—at no point can *we* ever ask, ‘What is it all for?’ At no point is that question even necessary. Because *we know what it’s for*.

I recently heard New Testament scholar N.T. Wright say this: “People assume that if God really wanted to sort the world out, he’d send in the tanks. He’d just sort of say, ‘Okay, enough of that.’ But based on the teachings of Jesus, when God wants to sort things out, he doesn’t send in the tanks. He sends in the meek and the broken-hearted and the peacemakers and the people who are hungry for justice and righteousness. “By *their* very ordinary below-the-radar work,” Wright says, “they actually demonstrate to the wider world what it looks like when God becomes king on earth as in heaven. And when people say, ‘But how can you possibly live like that?’ then the answer is again and again, ‘Well, we are followers of Jesus. We find as we read the gospels and find ourselves drawn into His story and find ourselves praying to the God who He called ‘Father’ *through* Him and invoking His own Holy Spirit, then this transforms *us* so that we can then become world-transforming people.”

Is that not what Paul’s getting at? That the way to being a world-transforming people *is to be* in an ongoing process of being transformed ourselves? To work it out together, with a fearful reverence to the God who is in the room with us and who is moving within us to will and to act according to *His* good purpose?

Is this not what it’s all for?