

Grumbling

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[0 : 00] Hello folks, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the pastor here at Church of the Messiah and it's my great privilege and honor to open the word with you. We'll be looking at Philippians chapter 2 beginning at verse 14 if you want to turn to that.

And just as you, well here, just as you're turning to it, let's just say a prayer. Father, we confess before you that we think we know ourselves really well and we think we know how the world works really well and so we often stand in judgment on your word.

And Father, we think these things, but Father, when we actually really do think about it, we realize that we don't know ourselves very well and we don't know the world very well and we are in no position to judge your word.

We ask, Father, that the Holy Spirit would come with might and power and deep conviction upon each of us so that as we think about Jesus and as we listen to your word, you would help us to understand better who we are and who we can be in and through the work and presence of Jesus in our lives.

So pour out the Holy Spirit, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. You sort of get a bit of the idea from the introduction is that if you're honest and what Christians, if we're honest, we often find the Bible underwhelming.

[1 : 27] We read it and say, is that all there is? Is that the big reveal? Is that the big message? And we're often disappointed. In fact, there's whole books written on the problem of disappointment with God.

Well, I want to suggest the text that we're going to look at today is a prime example of how we can be disappointed with God. But what it reveals is actually a lack of insight about ourselves.

And sort of a, I don't mean to offend you, when I say, like I'm including myself in this, you know, in the words of that old, beautiful old song, it's me, it's me, it's me, it's me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

So this isn't me pointing my finger at other people. You know, even if I point my finger, I'm conscious that there's three fingers pointing back at me, only one pointing away. But often, the fact of the matter is, is that we just assume we know about ourselves and we think we know what's important.

And God's word seems underwhelming. But by the grace and mercy of God, slowly and intermittently, I really do realize that the Bible is far wiser than I am.

[2 : 35] And I really need to camp with it and listen to it. So with that as a workup, we're going to look at Philippians chapter 2, verse 14 and following.

In particular, I'm going to read just the first three verses. And why this is a little bit underwhelming, you need to, if you read the book from beginning to end, you'll have a bit of a sense as to why this is an underwhelming text.

It is describing the problem of envy and rivalry. It's describing the problems of pride. There's this wonderful text that encourages us to try to deal with these things in a way which is more humble. There's this, well, I'm going to return to it in a moment. There's this very, very powerful, beautiful, poetic message of how God, the Son of God, seeing human need, didn't grasp or hold on to the advantages he had in heaven as God, the Son of God, in perfect fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit and the adoration of angels.

But setting all of that aside, but remaining God, he takes into himself our human nature. And he does this to serve. And his posture as a servant includes like a working class, lower working class life.

[3 : 54] And his posture of emptying and service goes all the way to him dying a very, very shameful death upon the cross. And then the Father's great exalting of him so that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is the highest name.

And then it goes right from that into this sort of a bit of a shocking text where it says to us that we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

As if there's something that we have to do 100% of all of that work to be made right with God. And then there's this like almost like a whiplash where all of a sudden then God says, but just remember that all of the work and all of the willing comes from me.

And now we have a word. And in our text, it goes, it doesn't have it, but it should say now. And so now you're sort of ready for something big. This powerful picture of Jesus, this profound encouragement to go 100%, this great mystery of 100% from God.

And now we're ready to hear, do all things without grumbling. You know what? It leads to that.

[5 : 08] 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 then the day of Christ, I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Like it's a little bit underwhelming. After this powerful, powerful text, that what we have to do is do all things without grumbling or disputing.

Now, if we camp with this, and I've had to camp with it all week, I'm going to confess to you, I was a bit underwhelmed. In fact, I realized one of the great benefits that I have in teaching the word is it makes me more honest with myself.

Not as often as it should be. You can pray that I will be more honest with myself. But because I know I have to actually teach it, I actually have to look at it and I think, well, you know, like we'd expect something more.

Wouldn't we? We'd expect take these 10 or 15 or 20 steps. Or, you know, like in terms of modern spirituality, it would be like you learn these yoga moves. You learn these meditation techniques.

[6 : 20] You master this body of knowledge. You do this. You do that. We expect something big. And all it says is do all things without grumbling or disputing. But here's the first point.

And it's a very important point that we don't realize without just thinking about the powerful thing of all things. The first point is the narrow way, in quotes, the narrow way of Jesus brings you in to the worldwide expanse of freedom.

And by the way, these points that I have will eventually be in the side thing here.

But one of the things is they'll all be online later on. Or you can email me if you're just curious and you want to have them. And we are working. Hopefully next week or later we'll be able to have these points on screen. We're also working today.

We thought we'd be able to hook up this video right directly onto the internet. We had technical problems that didn't allow us to have that. So we're still going through Wi-Fi.

[7 : 29] Just pray as we sort a couple of these things out to get rid of some of the jerkiness and some of the sound issues. Just pray for us. But back to the point. If you think about it for a second, what we usually think of is that there's religious things and non-religious things.

There's spiritual things and non-spiritual things. And one of the reasons that people don't like spirituality and they don't like religion is it takes up so much time. Like you've got to go to Bible studies. You've got to go to church.

You've got to give up your money. Like, you know, and then you have to, you know, do all sorts of certain things. Like a good example, getting outside of the Christian world, like for very devout Muslims, like there'd be things like because you want to be like Muhammad, you don't shave your mustache and you let your beard grow long.

Like another thing would be for a very devout Muslim that you have pants, which are a bit short because that's how Muhammad did it. And it just seems like there's all of these rules. But here all of a sudden there's this narrow way because Christians believe in this text is going to, and I'm going to talk about it more in a moment, that the only way that we can be made right with God is by what God has done to make us right with himself that we receive by faith.

And it's very, very narrow. It's only the person of Jesus. But when you enter into this narrow way, Jesus be my Savior and my Lord, and now you come to expect religion, it says do all things.

[8 : 49] Now, obviously it's going to say, you know, if you get to know the Bible, it doesn't include go ahead and murder and don't rape and all that. But there's this whole world of freedom. Do all things.

Like you don't have to have a certain type of job. You don't have to have a certain type of exercise. You don't even have to have exercise. You don't have to eat certain types of food. You don't have to eat in a certain pattern.

You don't have to do prayers at certain times. It's do all things. You're going rock climbing. You're going to go and hang out with a cafe once the lockdown and the shutdown's all thing. You're going to spend time with your friend.

You're going to spend time with your family. You're going to dance a dance, sing a song, paint a painting, balance a budget, build a business, work in the government. Do all things. The whole world is open.

You don't have to just learn a certain language. You don't have to live in a certain place. You don't have to dress a certain way. Do all things. All things. Like the Bible calls us to live in our father's world with freedom.

[9 : 52] And the freedom aspect is going to get into by this particular odd thing about grumbling. 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.

And it actually opens us up into an expanse of freedom. And that's why the grumbling text, which seems so trivial, like in an odd way, if you think about it, we grumble that the Bible would pick on grumbling.

Like we grumble about it. If you think about it for a second, like why on earth is he? Like, come on, God. Like, you know, take a chill pill. Like, what's so big? Like in a sense, we grumble about the fact that he warns us about grumbling, which if you think about it for a second, should give us a little tiny bit of an indication that there's something more going on with it.

But here's the first thing. I'm going to explain why grumbling. Well, here's the thing. Let me explain why he picked something which seems so small and so, like, trivial.

Six years ago, we bought the house that we currently live in. It was a house built in 1960, and it was an original owner, actually, that we bought it from. And it's sort of a corner lot that, like this side of the corner, so it has like a pie-shaped backyard.

[11 : 21] And one of the things that we noticed, and you couldn't help but not notice it when we looked at the house, is that off to the side, there was about 30 or 40 feet really old cedar hedge.

Really high, really old, and it broke up the yard. The only thing we could gather was that we guessed, and then we sort of figured, we ended up hearing later on that that was probably the case, that he had some things that he stored there, and he built the cedar, had planted the cedar hedge so that he could plant, put his RV or his trailers or his other stuff into this corner, and it would be out of view from the rest of the yard.

But we didn't want to have anything like that. We wanted to have the full use of our yard. So we had to get rid of the cedar hedge. Now, if you're at all like me, or if I'm like most of you, I have more time than money.

And so we didn't hire anybody. First of all, we cut down the hedge. But then, you just can't cut down the hedge, because then you have all these big pieces of wood sticking up about this high.

And if you don't do something else, it's going to just keep growing and growing and growing. So I had to spend days and days and days of back-breaking work with a pickaxe and some other things and shovels to one by one go throughout that entire length, dig down around the roots, and dig out the roots and pull the thing up.

[12 : 42] I ruined three shovels doing it. The three best shovels I could find, three of them, got broken in the process of trying to remove. And I eventually did remove this cedar hedge. And I got most of the roots, but not all of the roots.

But here's the thing. I cut the grass, and you get these little sprouts occasionally of a cedar hedge, which comes up. But you just mow those over with the lawnmower.

They just go like nothing, you know? But when those little roots, if you don't deal with those little tiny bits of a thing, they grow up into these huge cedar hedges, these huge cedar trees with these big root systems, which are really, really hard to get rid of.

And you see, so what this Bible text is saying about here is very, very wise. Here's the second point. Since you live beyond death, even the smallest sin in your life can grow to consume you. Since you live beyond death, even the smallest sin in your life can grow to consume you. But you still say, George, it's just like grumbling.

[13 : 46] Well, here's the thing. Now, it's going to be really hard. Like, what is grumbling? And to try to get into what grumbling is, it's going to probably be very hard to think about yourself at first.

So think of a situation where either a friend of yours grumbles, where you've been the boss, or you've been the manager, you've been the supervisor, you've been the dad, or the mom, or the parent, or whatever.

Because that would be the dad or the mom. And your kids are grumbling, you know, your adult kids are grumbling, or other people are grumbling. And what you notice is this.

First of all, grumbling and disputing. The word for disputing in the original language has two senses, depending on the context. One is a positive sense, and the other one is a bad sense.

The positive sense is that there's just sometimes you need to get into a discussion with somebody. You need to set forth your case because something's been done wrong. But in a negative sense, it's really describing something like being quarrelsome.

[14 : 42] And another way to look at it is grumbling is the outer, and this quarrelsome aspect is the inside aspect. What it's really talking about is that there's this aspect of us which is self-righteous, self-centered, proud thinking.

Like, think about other people's grumbling for a moment, okay? And, you know, they grumble and they send you an email or they give you a phone call or they take you aside.

They don't assume goodwill on me. They don't think that they know everything that needs to be known.

They don't actually ever think that there's more to the situation than they realize. They think that they're smarter than me, wiser than me, more practical than me.

They think they could do the job way better than me. They never, people who grumble, they never seek to understand what's going on as a first step.

[15 : 56] Why? Because they think they know what's going on. They don't, they've set aside, the more you grumble, the less you seek to understand. And on top of that, people who grumble, they think that they're right.

And they almost always give themselves a pass on the times that they've been wrong. But they don't give me or you a pass on the times that they've, that they've been, that we've been wrong. They remember it. They water it. They feed it. They give it the right type of environment so that it can grow.

Now isn't that true of other people? And isn't it all true, always true, also true, that it's easy for me to think of how this is for other people, but it's actually hard for me to think about it for myself?

So, you know, you just think about it. That is what I'm like. And that's a hard thing for me to confess. This has been a very challenging week for me spiritually, let me tell you.

[17 : 06] It's hard for me to acknowledge that there's this part of me that thinks I'm always right. For those of you who are watching this who disagree with me, like inside, part of me goes, sucks to be you.

I'm the one who's right. I'm the one who's wrong. I'm the one who's wise. And for some of you, if the Holy Spirit's moving in your lives, you're going, actually, George sucks to be you, because I'm the one who's always right.

And in fact, this tiny, tiny thing like grumbling opens up a deep condition of the soul that we tend to be self-righteous.

We tend to be self-centered. We tend to be self-centered. And we tend to be proud. And that's how we see the world. And it comes out in grumbling. If you watch any of the different pandemic movies, or any of the different types of plague movies, how do they all begin?

Or how do they all early on? I mean, usually there's something, I don't know, they're all having a party, they're all having a good time, they're all doing this, they're all doing that. But it almost always starts, not with all of a sudden, somebody with full-blown Ebola, or some other horrific plague, walking down the street, spewing blood.

[18 : 15] No, how does it always begin? A little cough. Or maybe they just, they go like this because they sweat a little bit, and it always begins, very tiny.

Isn't that how it always begins? The worst plagues? How we first become aware of it? Well, one moment here. All of a sudden, we see that the Bible is just saying, you want to have a bit of an insight into the state of, George, your self-righteousness, your self-centeredness, your proud thinking, your habit to not seek to understand, your habit to think that you're the wise one, you're the smart one, you're the insightful one, everybody else is whatever.

George, just look at your grumbling. Why? It's the cough. It's the little bit of a sweat from a fever. You see, since you, here's the third point, since you cannot leave yourself, you cannot deliver yourself.

You need a Savior who knows you and loves you. Since you cannot leave yourself, you cannot deliver yourself, you need a Savior who knows you and loves you.

[19 : 44] In fact, you know, you think about it, part of the text, which probably bothered some of you when you're reading it, and might have made some of you very, very troubled, listen to it again, verses 14 to 16.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing. Now, remember here that another way to put it is the disputing is the inner aspect. It should probably be translated as a quarrelsome spirit. The type of nitpicking, observational, put-down, cynical spirit that lurks in far too many of us.

Okay? 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.

That crooked and twisted, here's the thing to understand about this phrase. This is describing what human beings are like. And it isn't Paul saying, by the way, I'm not crooked and twisted, and it really sucks that the rest of the world is crooked and twisted, unlike straight, blameless, pure, innocent me.

Not at all. This is a very, very powerful image of what happens to us with pride. Because the fact of the matter is, is that you watch any movie that does this very well, read any book, think about somebody that you know that seems to be very, very proud, very, very, very self-righteous, very, very me-centered, very, very picky out of that.

[21 : 20] Do they seem like the strongest, straightest, wholest, most whole, free person? No. What do you think? You think it's bending them out of shape. You think it's making them smaller.

You think it's making it hard for them to do anything well. It's making it hard for them to be free, hard for them to love. You think it's making them crooked and twisted.

And the message of the gospel, the good news of the gospel, is really this. I am a crooked and twisted man who is only telling you about the one who is beginning to make me straight and will make you straight and whole and free.

The Christian gospel is one beggar telling another beggar where to find free food, where to find deliverance and warmth and security.

One beggar telling another beggar friend, I'm a beggar telling you about Jesus. You see, and if the fact of the matter is is that there's a part of us which is crooked and twisted, that means if I can't leave myself, I bring my crookedness and twistedness to religion.

[22 : 39] I bring my crookedness and twistedness to spirituality. I bring my crookedness and twistedness to therapy. I bring all of that always with me to whatever technique I want to be mindful but I can't be mindful really because at the end of the day there's still the me who is crooked and twisted.

I need someone, you need someone from outside who can deliver you. And that's what is so wonderful about the gospel.

Here's the fourth point. The gospel tells how the triune God has acted to unbend all human pride and atone for it, especially yours.

Another way to put it would be this. The gospel tells how the triune God has acted to untwist untwist and uncrookedness, that's not a word, all human pride and atone for it, especially yours.

That's what the gospel tells us. See, that's this wonderful thing. But the thing which is so remarkable about this story that Paul tells, if you go back and you read verses 6 to 11, is that God, the Son of God, in perfect harmony and fellowship with the Father and in the Holy Spirit, this eternity, ceaseless, giving and receiving, knowing, revealing and knowing, this loving and receiving of love, this eternity, this three persons but just this one God, this threeness but this unity of love and goodness, of truth, of mercy.

[24 : 29] and it is this triune God that's created you and me and this triune God who sees how we, seeking to be like God, in fact, rather than becoming like God, all that we did was made ourselves crooked and twisted.

A crookedness and making ourselves a crookedness and a twistedness that unless God intervenes, unless God restrains, would just go on for eternity. You see, you go back to that earlier analogy if in fact the matter is you live beyond death, even the smallest sin in your life can grow to consume you.

It's just like if you let that tiny little cedar hedge little thing grow and it grows and grows and grows and grows and grows and if you have a person who has a trouble with grumbling, if it starts to become clear to you that you grumble sometimes, if that grumbling isn't put to death and you outlive death, that grumble can grow and grow and grow until you become grumble.

A grumble who grumbles and cannot stop grumbling. And so we have this powerful image of the same God who's created all things, of God, the Son of God, doing the exact opposite of grumbling, the exact opposite of being self-centered, the exact opposite of being me first and proud and looking down his nose at others, of setting aside his glory, setting aside his prerogatives, setting all of these things aside and descending and descending and emptying and emptying and emptying himself even to the most shameful death upon the cross and tasting all there is to taste of death with nothing left.

And he does this for you and he does this for me. He doesn't do it for himself. And then this profound reversal and it's as if God, the Son of God, is taking our pride and our crookedness and our twistedness and not just me but me and you and every person who's in this room and every person on the planet and every person who's ever lived and so there's this profound movement by God, the Son of God and this profound lifting of freedom and joy of God, the Son of God and then when you or I put our faith and trust in Jesus, it's ours.

[26 : 49] we are in Him and so it becomes our experience that we begin to experience now a bit but one day in its fullness.

And the other wonderful thing about the Gospel is that in a sense that first part, if you go and you read verse 5 and then verses 6 to 11 how we're in Christ, then we see after that in verse 13 that it's God in us.

You see, it's the whole thing about love, right? That's why I've talked about this time and time and time again in love. In a sense, I enter into the other at least in a type of a spiritual sense, a mystical sense and the other enters into me.

There's that mutual entry and so in this thing that Jesus does to save us because we can't leave ourselves to save ourselves that whatever it is that He has accomplished on the cross to both pay the penalty of our crookedness and twistedness and in a sense to clothe us with His mighty act, a righteousness which is not our own and we get in Him and that is in us and that is why when you put your faith and trust in Jesus, you begin to experience this now but its final result is never in doubt.

Listen again to the text. Therefore, do all things without grumbling or disputing that you may be blameless and innocent children of God. It can also be translated that you may become blameless and innocent children of God without blemish.

[28 : 21] Blameless means in the eyes of the world. Innocent means in terms of your life and blemish means in terms of how God sees you. In a sense, it's the public, the inner, and the spiritual.

Children of God because you made His child by adoption and grace in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. I am a crooked and twisted man who has been redeemed by Jesus and trying to hold fast to the word of life in the power of the Holy Spirit that some of my crookedness and some of my twistedness will come to an end that I might be free, free to know, free to love, free to ask the questions, free to see beauty and excellence in others, free to pursue that which is good and just in lives of others in the creation in the world, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, holding fast to the word of life.

You see, the word of life is the message of the gospel in the context of all of the Bible and it's all of the Bible in the context of the gospel and the word of life is not something that gives you life but as you listen to it, it leads you in the way of life just as this text reveals the significance of grumbling and the inner life that goes along with it, right?

Like in a pandemic or plague movie, the cough, the sign of a vastly more dangerous situation than you realize with that cough.

The rest of the text in a sense unpacks it, listen to it. Actually, before you listen to it, I'm going to give you the final point, the takeaway point, which is this, the final point.

[30 : 08] It's also a prayer and once again, if you can't capture it and the little thing on the side, send me an email or go on the webpage, it'll be up there. loving Father, help me to put all my grumbling and self-righteous thinking to death and by the power of the Holy Spirit, help me to hold fast to the word of life so I will live free to love like my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Listen to the rest of the text as it unpacks what it's like to hold fast to the word of life. Listen to it.

Even if I, verse 17, am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoiced with you all. Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoiced with me. His love and service for them and their love and service for him is a sacrifice.

It's the opposite of being self-centered. It's a death or a service for others. And then he grounds it in the lives of two people whom they know. Verse 19, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon that I too may be cheered by news of you for I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. The opposite of grumbling. But you know Timothy's proven worth how as a son with a father he has served me in the gospel.

[31 : 31] I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me. And I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier and your messenger and minister to my need.

Once again the opposite of grumbling of self-righteousness of pride a giving of yourself for the other keeping your eyes on Jesus a type of freedom which expands beyond the world from Greece to Rome from Jerusalem to Greece to Greece to Rome.

It's a world of freedom for he has been longing for you all the opposite of grumbling. He has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.

Indeed he was ill near to death but God had mercy on him and not only on him but on me also lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him therefore that you may rejoice rejoicing the opposite of grumbling at seeing him again and that I may be less anxious.

So receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor such men. The sacrifice for he nearly died for the work of Christ risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

[32 : 47] Friends what is this text calling me to? What is this text calling you to? It's a prayer like this. Lord Jesus help me to put all my grumbling and self-righteous thinking to death and by the power of the Holy Spirit help me to hold fast to the word of life so I will live free to love like my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

That is my final prayer. Amen. God bless.