

Co-workers of Christ

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[0 : 0 0] If you would take your Bibles and open them to page 185, near the back, Philippians chapter 2. And as I begin, if you're new with us today, we're celebrating 10 years that I've been the senior minister of this parish.

That in itself is a little bit overwhelming to me. And we had between the services a kind of a celebration, and thank you for those of you who came. I was very glad that it wasn't sentimental.

There was a lot of rudeness and songs sung to the tune of Waltzing Matilda and that kind of thing, being cheeky about my accident proneness.

So I was very glad and feel very privileged. Now, thank you for coming to help me celebrate my 10th anniversary. I do hope you've come for other reasons as well.

I know some have come for Seth's baptism, some because you've been invited. And at this point in the service, we open God's word because this is the way in which we hear God speak to us and call us by name.

[1 : 0 9] He challenges us and addresses the issues that we are facing day by day. And he encourages us and corrects us and trains us.

And as we turn to this letter over the last weeks, we have heard the Apostle Paul speaking about the outrageous humility of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who gave away his position of equal glory with God in heaven and emptied himself and became one of us as a human.

And in his life with us, humbled himself to the point of death on the cross in a deliberate attempt to serve us, to die in our place, to give us what we could not have ourselves, the life of heaven, forgiveness of sins.

And God's response, you remember, was to lift him to the highest place, to give him the highest honor, to give him the name Lord so that all would bow to his authority. And last week, we looked at those two verses, 12 and 13, where the Apostle shows how all this great work of God becomes real in our lives, how we are to work out that salvation into all the areas of our lives because God is at work in us, both in our will and in our action for his own good pleasure, transforming us so that we might become like Jesus.

We might be little Jesuses, planting in our hearts holy desires, enabling us to do what we couldn't do without him, to love him, to love one another, to want to obey him, to want to serve the spiritual needs of others.

[2 : 5 5] Well, that is what it means to be a Christian. And today, as we look at these verses, 14 to the end of the chapter, the Apostle becomes alarmingly practical. We need to ask this question, what does the Christian life look like?

What does it, in the practical, day-by-day details of life, what does it look like that God is working salvation in us? And the Apostle gives us the answer in two spheres of our life.

Firstly, he speaks about working out salvation into Christ's world. Verse 14. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.

The Apostle says that God has placed us in the middle, in the midst of a particular generation. God has given to us a particular generation and he's given us to a particular generation.

And we have a real and pressing responsibility to this generation. It has never been God's way for Christians to hide out in a bunker and wait for the coming of Jesus.

[4 : 16] We've been placed here, in this city, in this culture for a particular reason. And the Apostle calls his generation a crooked and perverse generation.

And it doesn't mean because his was a particularly wicked, sinful and evil generation. That is Bible shorthand of speaking of each successive generation as it rejects the truth of God and seeks to build a world without him.

And it's easy for us to see how crooked and perverse our generation is. Just take any part of Christ's teaching and hold it up and see how ridiculous and how preposterous it sounds in the real world.

We just take the teaching about Jesus that we've looked at over the last couple of weeks in this passage. How Jesus deliberately empties himself and humbles himself and relinquishes what is his by right for the sake of even those who hate him.

That's an absurd policy. I mean, we live in a culture which is built on the assumption that we have certain rights and life is about the accumulation and the exercise of my rights.

[5 : 29] Well, take the idea that Jesus, who was rich in heaven, became poor, gave it all away so that we might become rich. Again, a dangerously ridiculous idea.

We have set up our social institutions in such a way that they preach back to us the message that we want to hear. It is our right to pursue and to accumulate wealth as much as we possibly can. And those two simple illustrations just show how crooked and perverse our generation is.

But the point the apostle is making is that as followers of Jesus Christ, our lives are meant to be demonstrably different.

The way in which we live, the mark of God at work in us, is that we are essentially different from our culture. That is the way we work out salvation, by having a mode of life that is fundamentally at odds with the world around us.

So the apostle says, we are to be blameless, innocent, children of God, without blemish. That is your responsibility and mine. In this generation, we are to have lives of obvious integrity, to conduct our business transactions in a way that is obviously blameless, not cutting corners, not doing what everyone else does.

[6 : 55] It means living our family lives without blemish. Working out salvation will turn us, ought to turn us into better citizens, trustworthy employees and employers, considerate neighbours, devoted husbands and wives, sympathetic and generous people, committed to the good of others, because our inner compass is controlled by the humility of Christ.

And if you ask the question, should it matter to a Christian what the world thinks of you? The answer is yes. Not in the ultimate sense where we do things for the sake of the approval of those around us, but in the salvation sense.

We are meant to live in such a way that we do not put any barrier so that people will see how brilliant Jesus is. We are to do nothing that condemnation come on the person of Jesus Christ.

There are many who profess to be Christian and they have a veneer of niceness nailed onto a solid bulk of selfishness. And throughout the New Testament, when we are called to live godly lives, lives of integrity, it's not just for our own sake, it's for the sake of others who see us and see Christ.

And that is why the apostle is not content to leave us with blameless lives. He says, the way in which we live in this generation is also that we should shine as lights holding forth the word of life.

[8 : 24] This word of life that has come to us, through which the life of God and the life of heaven comes to us. And our responsibility to this city and this generation is to hold it out, to hold it forth in such a way that others might come to see it.

He's talking about communication. And isn't it interesting that he is not writing to the clergy? He's writing to congregation members.

That is, the responsibility for the transmission and the dissemination and the advance of the gospel lies with you as much as it does with me. This is how we work out our salvation in this generation, by living lives which are obviously different and by holding forth the word of life.

That's how we do it in the generation. Secondly, the apostle turns to another sphere and he says, we are to work out our salvation in Christ's church.

Now it's been very moving for me as I've come to this Sunday thinking about being 10 years your pastor and I want to say this passage is deeply challenging to me and I hope it will be to you.

[9 : 38] Turn back to verse 14. Do all things without grumbling or questioning. And we should probably do a series on these two words.

Grumbling is when my displeasure and fault finding turns inward and I mutter to myself. And the word questioning is when I'm fully convinced of my own self-righteousness that muttering bursts out in criticism of others.

The apostle says do all things without grumbling or questioning. And the reason is not because it's going to save a heck of a lot of time nor because it's good for you nor because when you do it it's bad for others.

But the reason is because this is the sure way to resist the work of Christ in your life and in my life. Because the church at Philippi was facing disagreement and dissension and discord.

And the apostle warns them against grumbling and discord because it is a spiritual disease which sucks the life and joy out of our faith and the faith of those who are round about us.

[10 : 51] And it is the very opposite of looking to the interests of others. And it produces spiritual grumpiness which is something we don't want. Now these two words grumbling and questioning have a noble history in the Bible.

They're used in the Old Testament for the people of God Israel in the desert in the wilderness and it shows us how complaining works. Because complaining although it's ultimately aimed at God is usually directed at the leader of the group.

So when God's people grumbled against God they took it out on Moses. Moses had his faults as do every Christian leader and the Bible never encourages us to follow Christian leaders blandly or blindly but only so far as they live faithfully to the word of God and teach faithfully to the word of God and then we are supposed to oppose them.

But the reason that the apostle directs us here is because the attitude of disrespect for leaders had entered into the congregation and that's what happens when there is disagreement.

And that is why from verses 19 to 30 the apostle commends two leaders Timothy and Epaphroditus because an undercurrent of suspicion and disrespect had crept into the group.

[12 : 18] Look at verse 29 he says receive him in the Lord with all joy speaking of Epaphroditus and honour such men. what is it about these two leaders that Paul chooses to commend?

It is not their great and grand giftedness their successful track record their political savvy it is the way in which they emulated the humility of Jesus Christ because you see when Jesus consecrated himself to be obedient to God the way in which he showed it was by serving people and that is what we are meant to do.

Timothy you see is genuinely anxious for your welfare he says Epaphroditus so deeply cares for you as a congregation he risks his very life and both these men show that God is at work in them and the way they show it is they place their gifts at the disposal of God's people they take the humility of Christ into their relationships they pour themselves out for the spiritual benefit of others they take extravagant risks for their fellow Christians and Paul is doing the same thing he is imprisoned by himself and he says I am going to send these two men to you but most movingly Paul explains the reason the motivation the reason he is writing the letter the reason he is doing the ministry his whole reason and it is in verse 16 and I wonder if you would just look at it the second half of that verse reads so that

Paul says in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain the reason behind everything Paul does in his ministry is so that in the day of Christ he doesn't weary labor in vain or run in vain because among the glories of heaven for the apostle is the glorious prospect that the people to whom he was ministering will be there and it is the same for every Christian pastor and every Christian minister among the glories of heaven is the most glorious prospect that you will be there and that is what the apostle labored for and that is what he ran for and that is what I have labored for for ten years and that is what I run for otherwise all my labor and all my running is completely in vain and I do want I do not want to be emotional and I do not want to be manipulative in any way but I need to tell you that my worst nightmare is to be there without any of you and this is why

Jesus has come this is the work of the gospel this is why I am a servant of the gospel the apostle labors and runs and toils so that others will come to see and know the salvation that God has given us in Jesus Christ so that on the day of Christ when this life is over when this world is over when history is complete when God remakes the new heavens and the new earth God will bring to completion that magnificent work of salvation that he has begun in us and he will welcome us and say well done good and faithful servants this is the reason St.

[15 : 56] John's exists it is the reason and purpose of my ministry it is not I need to tell you it is not to put on nice services to prop up the organizational structure I am not here to be your chaplain nor to build a big church to preach well to be liked to run a smooth operation but to run and toil so that the day of Christ will reveal that the God who is work at work in you now will bring it to completion for his own good pleasure and this I think is the deepest love that we can have for one another not to be polite not to avoid conflict but to do what we can to ensure that those we love will be in heaven would would that the day of Christ burned in me in the way that it burned in the apostle it would give fire to my to my labor and to my running now when I finish sermons I usually make application of what God is saying to all of us but today I want to make two applications just to me as your pastor but you're allowed to listen and the first is this and it has to do with the privilege of serving you

I want you to know how something of how remarkable it is to be a pastor but specifically to be your pastor to be involved in the work of salvation is completely astonishing to see God at work in your lives to see you living lives of increasing integrity in this crooked and perverse generation to see you demonstrate the humility of Christ in the face of tremendous provocation to see you take risks of faith placing your gifts at the disposal of the body of believers and what a joy it is to see when someone moves from being a spectator to being a participator to being a fellow worker someone who is marked by praying for the work of God for salvation amongst us someone who sees it as their responsibility to hold out the word of life to others who sees it as important that we stand and strive side by side for the faith of the gospel and I want to commit myself afresh this morning to the work of salvation that God is doing here right under our noses it is very striking to me the way in which the apostle speaks to this congregation you should take the letter and read it when you go home he is unafraid to say to them that he loves them and longs for them that he takes deep joy in their partnership in the gospel that he wants to defend them from false teaching that they are his joy and crown and it's important for me to say before we all get too much older that I long for you that you are in my heart that I yearn for you with the affection of Christ and I regard myself as a very fortunate man indeed to be your servant in the gospel that's the first thing the second thing has to do with the privilege of being the servant of Christ and I want to be honest with you that in my ministry and I think most people

I know in ministry have a kind of a twofold almost opposite feeling about ministry on the one side is this feeling of impossible and high privilege on the other side is a feeling of deep failure fear I am very conscious of my own inadequacies and sins and I am very conscious of yours and while God is working salvation through us it seems to me sometimes so brittle and when I look at the person of Jesus Christ I fear that our courage is so tame and so sporadic and our risks of faith are so small and so safe and I speak about myself I think our love is so superficial and I'm conscious of how poorly we hold forth the word of life and rather being different than our culture we are just the same and the reality of the day of Jesus Christ that we will that you will all one day stand in front of him brings a tremendous power and focus to me and my ministry and I want to commit myself today to Jesus

Christ to labor and run so that in that day I will be proud I want to commit myself to live the life of Christ to teach the word of Christ to enjoy the love of Christ to live out and share this salvation that is ours in him so that when we come to that day we will be there and when we see each other we will know that all the work that we have done together is gloriously and fabulously not in vain this is my commitment amen truthfully and as he comes to I gotta talk about can I happen to take a nap m■ you me should I ■■■cope ■■■

I can I have a I can I fight go