

Thursday Evening - English

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, if we could, for a short time this evening, turn back to the chapter that we read together in Paul's letter to the Philippians and chapter 1.

Philippians chapter 1. And I'd like us to take for our text this evening the words that we have in verse 6. Philippians chapter 1, verse 6.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Friends, I would like this evening to begin by asking you all, how sure are you of your salvation?

As you sit here in this church this evening and ask yourself that question, how sure are you that you are safe in Christ tonight?

[1 : 06] And I'm sure if we were to go around this church, we would have many different answers. Some would say that I am completely assured of my faith in Christ.

I know I have been saved. I never, ever doubt. Well, perhaps others would say, well, I'm not so sure.

For one reason or another, I lack assurance. And I just can't lay hold of the fact that I am Christ and that he is mine.

Well, the words that we have before us this evening, they are no doubt words that are familiar to us. These are words that we have heard quoted time and time again over the years.

Yet these are words that, although perhaps are familiar to us, these are words that are so rich. They are so rich in their content so that whatever your situation is tonight, no matter how assured you are of your faith or otherwise, these are words that speak to us of exhortation, of encouragement, and of hope.

[2 : 21] And friends, we need these words, don't we? We need that message of encouragement at the beginning of this communion weekend to enable us to realize and to remember exactly what it is we have in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now, one of the things that characterizes Paul's letter to the Philippians is a deep inner joy. Now, looking at Paul's situation, you would say that he is somebody who would be anything but joyful. He's somebody who's been shipwrecked. He's somebody who's been persecuted. He's somebody who's been imprisoned more than once. In fact, he's writing this very letter here from the darkness of a prison cell in Rome.

Yet throughout this letter, we see that undercurrent of joy, the deepness and the fullness of joy that is his in Christ.

We can so often think that joy is characterized by somebody wearing a smile upon their face, by somebody perhaps being of a jovial disposition.

[3 : 37] Yet the reality is that joy is so much deeper than this. Joy in the Lord is so much deeper than this. And this was the deep kind of joy that Paul here has, because humanly speaking, he had nothing to be happy about.

And so he starts off his letter, and he writes to this church in Philippi, and he begins by greeting them and by giving them thanks for their fellowship and for the support that they've offered to him through his ministry.

These are people who he knows fairly well. This is a letter that's perhaps different to his other letters, because we see something of this personality of Paul shining through.

We can see that there's more of a personal touch to this letter. And so he goes on, after greeting his friends in this church, after thanking them, he then goes on to the words that we have in our text tonight.

I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 54] And you know, friends, in speaking these words, or rather writing these words, what Paul is here doing is he's laying a foundation upon which the rest of his letter will be built upon.

Without this truth that we have before us here, anything else that Paul says in his letter, it would be spoken in vain. It would be worthless. So what is Paul saying?

What is Paul saying to us in these familiar words that we have before us here tonight? Well, he begins by telling his friends in the Philippine church that he is sure of this.

He is sure of this. What is it that he's so sure of? Well, no doubt he's sure of the faithfulness of this church, a church that he's known since it began at that Riverside prayer meeting where he met with these two or three women there.

And he saw that church growing from that small number. He's sure that they're growing into a faithful gathering of believers. And he's also sure that this is a church that has many trophies of grace, no doubt.

[6 : 12] You remember that Lydia, the seller of purple, she was one of these women and so she was part of this church, as was the Philippine jailer himself.

And so he's certain that there are people in this church who are trophies of grace. But yet he's certain of more, is he not?

He's certain of so much more because his surety, his certainty, his confidence, as the authorised version puts it, it's not in these Philippians.

His confidence is in their God. I am sure of this, he says, that he who began a good work. He who began a good work.

He doesn't say, I am sure of this, that I who began a good work. He doesn't say, I am certain of this, that you who began a good work.

[7 : 12] No, it's he who began a good work. And so straight away, Paul is here affirming that his confidence for the Philippine church is in Christ and Christ alone.

This is his starting point. And friends, ought it not to be our starting point? Ought it not to be that we don't have confidence in ourselves, in our own resources, in our own abilities?

We don't have confidence even in the abilities and resources of others? Our confidence is always first and foremost in Christ and Christ alone.

So important that we lay hold of that as a body of believers at all times. There's such a temptation, is there not, to run away from this truth, to neglect this truth.

Yes, we know that the Lord is there, but we have Christ plus ourselves. No, we start with Christ, as Paul does here. But what exactly is this good work that he's speaking of?

[8 : 21] Is it the justification of the believers of Philippi? Well, we know it can't be the fact that God's free grace has forgiven all of their sins.

We know it can't be that, because that is a one-off act. It's already happened. It's not something that's going to continue. So we know it's not their justification. Is it their adoption?

Is it the fact that they've been received into the family of God, and that now they can say, Abba, Father, as children of God? We know that this is also a one-off act.

When we're received into the family of God, we are there to stay. This verse doesn't really tell us exactly what this work is.

But yet if we look elsewhere at Paul's writing, and especially in the words of Romans 8, 28, we get a better idea. There he says, We know these words well, don't we?

[9 : 31] These are familiar words. But it's the next verse that we're told exactly what this purpose is, what this work is. For whom he foreknew, Paul says, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

To be conformed to the image of his Son. And so that's the work that the Lord is working in the church in Philippi.

That's the work that the Lord is working in you and in me tonight, if we are a child of God. That work of sanctification in which we're being conformed more and more to the image of his Son.

Yes, we've been adopted. Yes, we've been justified. That is true. But tonight, we are still sinners.

Each and every one of us gathered here, we are still sinners.

And the fact is, we are yet to perfectly reflect the image of our Saviour. We were created in his image.

[10:42] But yet this image has been marred, has it not? This image has been disfigured and distorted by sin. And so this is at a profound effect on how we live and how we function tonight, even as the Lord's people.

We know this because the Christian life is a life that is fraught with trials, with tribulation, with discouragement, with temptations.

In many ways, it's a constant battle. It's a difficult path to tread. It's a difficult path to negotiate. A path which the Lord himself calls us, while we are on it, to watch and to pray.

Why does he say this? In case we enter into temptation. And so we are still sinners. Of course, Paul knew this.

He knew that there was a work that needed to be worked in him. He knew there was a work that needed to be worked in the church in Philippi.

[11:59] And in experiencing that very work in his own life, he had confidence in it. He had confidence in the fact that the same spirit that had justified and adopted was the same spirit who was now able to sanctify and to bring this good work to completion.

You see, the Lord never starts something that he doesn't finish. We often do that, don't we? We start something and perhaps we put our mind to it, but then we fail to complete it.

Or perhaps we commit to something and then after a while, for one reason or another, we find ourselves opting out. We find ourselves dropping out of whatever it is that we've committed to.

Perhaps it's too difficult. Perhaps it's not to our taste. And so we turn our back on it. But not so with the Lord. Paul is here saying that the Lord is absolutely determined to continue this good work in his people.

That nothing, absolutely nothing will stop him. And not even the gates of hell will prevail against this work. You know, how often do we need reminded of this?

[13:26] Not only for our encouragement, but also tonight for our guidance. It's true to say that so often we make God just like us.

We bring him down to our level. And so because we often forget him, we think that perhaps he has forgotten us.

And because oftentimes we find ourselves lacking in commitment to him, that he too reciprocates that lack of commitment to us. That's not the God we serve tonight, dear friend.

You see, we serve a God who sees the bigger picture. He knows the whole redemptive story, chapter and verse beginning to end.

And the fact is that he has invested far too much in it for him to give up on us now. And so he works this work in us.

[14:33] Sinclair Ferguson said that when the Spirit of the Lord comes to dwell in us, that this isn't a matter of rearranging furniture or even building an extension.

It involves demolition and major reconstruction. Much needs to be put off and much needs to be put on.

Isn't that so true in our own lives? That so much needs to be demolished? So many of these idols in our hearts, they need to be replaced by the truths and the promises of the Lord.

And it's true also, is it not, that when any major works begins on a building, often what happens is that as that building has been worked upon, many different structural problems are discovered and brought to light that nobody knew were there.

And that's what it's like, friends, with your heart and with mine. The more that the Spirit of the Lord shines on our heart, the more of this demolishing of these idols in our heart, the more of that reconstruction that enables us more and more to die unto sin and to live unto Christ, what happens?

[16:01] The more we see how dark our hearts are, the more we see how sinful and ignorant we really are, so that we too can put our amen to the words of Paul when he says that he is the chief of sinners.

That's what sanctification is. That's the work that he is working in us. And it's hard at times, dear friend, is it not?

Because not only do we have to contend with ourselves battling with the flesh, but so often we also have to contend with our circumstances.

The chances are that for most, if not all of us gathered here, as we have come and put our trust in Jesus Christ, we find our lives far more challenging now than our lives were before we were the

Lord's.

And that can be a puzzle to us, can't it? We wonder why life is going so smoothly for those who have not put their trust in the Lord. We look at our unconverted friends and perhaps they don't have a care in the world and the weight of the world is upon our shoulders.

[17 : 22] And we wonder why? Why is my providence such? Why am I so bothered with sin?

Yet, friends, such a great part of this very work that is spoken of here is, this isn't always easy, is being able to see our afflictions through that wide lens of eternity.

That's where the key lies. That's where the relief comes. And as we mature as Christians, as the Lord's people, when we look at our lives through that wider lens of eternity, we're able to say with Paul that this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

That is the end of this work. That eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

A work that is refining us in the fire. Yes, that is testing us in the fire. Absolutely. But nonetheless, a work after which we will come forth as God.

[18 : 42] And you know, when we lay hold of this truth by faith, everything changes, does it not? This eternal perspective, it impacts our whole life.

It leads us to assess all that we do in the light of this glorious eternity that lies ahead for us. This eternal perspective, it leads us to question our thoughts.

It leads us to ask whether our thoughts, our words and our actions, are they conforming us more and more to the image of Christ? Or to the image of this world?

That's a challenge tonight, dear friends. But I challenge nonetheless that each and every one of us need to take to heart as we examine our lives before a holy God.

And of course, with this work of sanctification, there's perseverance required, is there not? There's a keeping on, keeping on required.

[19 : 56] Scripture tells us that it's those who endure unto the end who will be saved. Not those who start, but those who endure unto the end who will be saved.

And so there's a perseverance. But friends, we rejoice tonight that when we're saved, it's not as if we're thrown, we're cast out into the wilderness of this world with nothing more than our own feeble strength to sustain us.

Oh, how it can feel like that at times. Absolutely, it feels like that. It feels such that at times we wonder even if a good work has begun in our heart when we see nothing but darkness around us.

The fact is that if the Lord Jesus has begun a good work in us, and this is encouraging, if he's begun a good work in us, he is with us every step of the way, whether we feel it or not.

That's how fickle we are, is it not? We gauge so much upon how we feel. Absolutely, feelings are good when they're good.

[21 : 19] But when they're not, what happens? What do we lean upon? What do we have to lean upon? Nothing. And so we do not lean upon our feelings tonight.

We lean upon the finished work of Christ. It's all of grace. It's all of grace. And this is a work that we cannot start ourselves.

Anything that we seek to do in and offer ourselves in the name of the Lord, it will come to nothing. It might spring up rapidly like we see with the parable of the sower and the seed.

It might blossom quickly. But as soon as the cares of this world come and attack it, what happens? It withers. Why? Because it's done in the strength of man.

But not so with the work of the Lord. That's what this whole communion weekend is about, is it not? That acknowledgement that the Lord Jesus has done for us what we could never do for ourselves.

[22 : 32] And because we acknowledge that he has done for us what we could never do for ourselves on that cross. We acknowledge that he is able to do for us each and every day of our lives what we need to be enabled to grow in grace.

To be conformed to his image. But how do I know? You might ask.

You might be sitting here and saying, well I know all these truths. I've heard them time and time again. But how do I know in my heart that he has begun a good work in me?

Perhaps you're a Christian and for whatever reason you've gone at the rift. Your love for the Lord is not what it once was. Yes, you're going through the motions outwardly.

But in your heart you wonder, has he begun? Has he really begun a good work in me? Well dear doubting friend.

[23 : 40] The fact is that the Bible tells us that the carnal mind is enmity towards God. The natural man, he or she, they hate the things of God.

You see the carnal man is quite happy to have Jesus as Saviour. But not as Lord. The carnal man is quite happy to wear the crown.

But not to bear the cross. They will gladly enjoy the eternal benefits of salvation. But yet they refuse to have King Jesus sit upon the throne of their heart.

That, my friend, is the way of the hypocrite. What do you long for tonight? What is the craving of your soul?

Is it that Christ would be your prophet, your priest and your king? Well friends, if it is, surely he has begun a good work in you.

[24 : 49] For this is never the desire nor the longing of the Christless soul. The Lord himself says in John chapter 10, verses 27 and 28.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.

Neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. What an encouragement. What a promise for us to lean upon tonight.

No matter what the devil is saying to you. Perhaps he's saying that you're not good enough. Well, he's right. Perhaps he's saying that you're not going to be able to finish this race.

Well, again, he's right. You cannot finish this race in your own strength. Maybe he's saying to you, you're not even a Christian at all.

[25 : 59] Has he ever said that to you? And you just remember, friend, that he is the father of lies. He is the accuser of the brethren.

Yes, our flesh and our heart, as the psalmist says, they do faint and fail. Yet the reality is that for the child of God, that God will fail us never.

Once in Christ, always in Christ. That never changes. And as the prophet Jeremiah so beautifully reminds us, he has loved us with an everlasting love.

An everlasting love. This is a love that's eternal. This is a love that's unchangeable. And you know, this is what makes this love even deeper.

This is what gives this love that added dimension. You see, this is a work that started long before you were born. This is a work that started long before even the heavens and the earth were created.

[27 : 06] This is a work that was decreed in the councils of eternity between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That you, poor, wretched sinner, would be a child of God, one of the elect.

The Westminster Confession reminds us that out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight or faith, he didn't look ahead to any trust that we would put in him and then decide that we would be saved.

There's so much packed into that statement, but yet in that statement there's so much comfort for us here tonight.

Yes, this is a secret council. And so it's not ours to know the wise and the wherefores of God's elect. That is not our business.

But what we do know is that there is encouragement in this great doctrine of election. Because as Paul reminds Timothy, the Lord knows who are his.

[28 : 32] Because he knows who are his. He will continue that work in each and every one of us right up until that day when he makes up his jewels.

Sage Spurgeon said, I believe the doctrine of election. Because I am quite certain that if God hadn't chosen me, I should never have chosen him.

How true. And I am sure that he chose me before I was born, or else he would never have chosen me afterwards. And he must have elected me for reasons unknown to me.

For I could never find any reason in myself why he should have looked upon me with special love. And so friends, we rejoice tonight, do we not?

We rejoice that although we're not what we would like to be before the Lord, even at the beginning of this communion weekend, we rejoice that although we fall short in so many ways, day after day after day, we come tonight and we lean upon our beloved.

[29 : 56] He has begun that good work in you, and he will bring it on. He will bring that work to completion, right until the day of Jesus Christ.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3, But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of God, are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

That is our hope tonight, that we will be transformed from glory to glory, into the same glorious image of Christ, so that one day, perhaps not too far from now, we will see him face to face, and we will be like him.

That's what life is all about. That's why we're here. We're here, but for a few short years. Why? To glorify God, yes, but to enjoy him forever and ever.

Imagine what that's going to be like, to live in that holy perfection. Imagine what it'll be like to live without sin.

[31 : 23] So much of our world, so much of our community, so much even, sad to say, of our church, is characterized by sin.

We praise God that our lives are just like a vapor. Our time here is short. that we have a hope that extends so far beyond these few short years.

Friends, do we think of this often? Do we meditate on this often? Is this our very motivation for breathing the air that we breathe every day, looking forward, looking forward to that day when we will see our precious Lord and Savior and be like Him?

Oh, it ought to be so that we can be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in us will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Oh, that that day would be hastened, that that day would hurry up so that we would know what it is to have this shadow of sin lifted, so that we we will know what it is to live life to the full in that sinless eternal communion with our Savior in heaven at last.

[32 : 54] That's what we long for. Let it be our meditation not only in the days that lie ahead but in the weeks, the months and the years.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord our God, our Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We give thanks, O Lord, that Thou art a God who enables us by Thy grace to see beyond the here and now that we are but passing through here.

This is not our home. We are but pilgrims making our way to that celestial city and so we pray that as we do so as children of God, we would live our lives in the light of eternity as servants of Christ looking to that great day when Thou will complete that work which Thou has started in us making us perfect in holiness.

Go before us now we ask and forgive us for Jesus' sake. Amen. Friends, we'll conclude our time of worship now by singing to God's praise from Psalm 121.

[34 : 13] Psalm 121 from the Scottish Psalter. Find that on page 416 of the blue psalm books.

I to the hills will lift mine eyes from whence doth come mine aid my safety cometh from the Lord who heaven and earth hath made my foot he'll not let slide nor will he slumber that he keeps behold he that keeps Israel he slumbers not nor sleeps we can sing the whole psalm now to God's praise I to the hills will lift mine eyes from whence doth come mine aid standing to sing why do my sight He promised from the Lord

To heaven and earth hath made Thy fruit he'll not let slide Nor will he slumber that he gave Him holy God keeps Israel His lambs first long nor cease The Lord he keeps the Lord thy shape On thy right hand that's hid

The moon by night he shall not smile Nor yet the sun by day The Lord shall give thy soul He shall return me from the land And for thy glory night And for thy glory night God keeps forever well God keeps forever well God keeps forever well God keeps forever well He shall return me from the land

To heaven and earth hath made