

A LETTER FROM PRISON



THE PARADOX OF JOY IN SUFFERING
paul's letter to the philippian church

Week 4: Salvation Workout

INTRODUCTION – Who Is Jesus?

1 Corinthians 4:6; John 1:1; 20:28-29; Mark 12:1-12
Compare Revelation 1:8, 17; 21:3-7; and 22:12-16; Isaiah 44:6

Look To The Book – Who Is The Church?

Philippians 2:12-30

- With the example of Christ front and centre, Paul returns to practical instruction for his readers regarding unity. Demonstrating thoughtful leadership, he encourages what is best in them as peers and friends rather than chastising them.
- Our “salvation” is presented as an ongoing process that is: a) our shared responsibility (“your” is plural, “salvation” is singular, and “in” can be translated “among”), and b) inspired and empowered by God. God has done the God part, and now we are called to live it out in our lives as the Body of Christ. Note: This indwelling intimate empowering by a deity is unparalleled in ancient non-biblical religion.
- The “fear and trembling” that should be part of our lives can mean: a) panic and terror, or b) awe and wonder. In light of passages like 1 John 4:16-18, Paul has “b” in mind. Also, fear and trembling is the biblically expected response to an awareness of God’s presence. We should therefore live with this ongoing awareness.
- The background story: Israel was freed from slavery in Egypt through the Passover (death of the firstborn). God guided them by being light in their midst and gave them the Torah (God’s Law). But because of their ongoing “grumbling and arguing” (e.g., Exodus 16:1-21; 17:3; Numbers 14:1-35; 16:41; 17:5, 10, etc.), Israel was judged by God for being a “warped and crooked generation” (Deuteronomy 32:5) and that generation was not allowed into the Promised Land. Paul uses this backdrop to encourage his readers to rewrite the story of Israel. Here is your chance, he says – be more like the Lord than like Israel in that story. Be light! (Also see Daniel 12:3; Matthew 5:14-16.)
- Key words... BLAMELESS: Above the criticism the world. PURE: Single-minded, an undivided heart. CHILDREN OF GOD: Suggests the renewal of Israel. Do we bear a family resemblance to our Dad? WITHOUT FAULT: Used to refer to the perfection of God himself. He should be our standard, our bull’s-eye.
- Paul refers to judgement day as “the day of Christ” instead of “the day of the LORD” as is common in the Hebrew Scriptures. What does this say about Paul’s Christology?
- In giving practical news about Timothy and Epaphroditus, Paul uses them as examples of the kind of self-giving service he is calling his readers to.
- Notice that Paul doesn’t highlight Timothy’s teaching gifts or leadership skills, but his genuine care for people. Paul then connects this with what it means to care about Jesus.
- About Epaphroditus, Paul uses family, business, military, and priestly imagery to describe their close relationship. These gentle, supportive, caring, hardworking people should be the heroes of our church communities, the ones we most deeply honour.

So What?... Becoming Like Christ Our Example

TAKE OUT #1: The New Testament records an amazing reworking and renewal of a religion that had lost its way, clinging to the letter of the law and missing the Spirit. Christians should not focus on this as a rebuke of Judaism per se, but should ask the ongoing question of how these rebukes and challenges apply to the Christianity of our day.

TAKE OUT #2: In the Bible, “fear and trembling” is always the immediate response of someone who becomes suddenly aware of God’s personal presence. At first it may mean “panic and terror”, but God helps people shift into “awe and wonder”. What is central to this experience is awareness of God’s presence, which seems to be Paul’s main thrust. What are you doing to increase your ongoing awareness of God’s presence?

TAKE OUT #3: Complaining and arguing should not be a part of church culture. Instead we should be active participants in a Kingdom culture of mutual encouragement and understanding. Is this our reputation on the street today? Is this your disposition? Do you actively work toward it?

e.g., Philippians 1:18; Mark 9:38-41 (vs. Matthew 12:30);
1 Timothy 3:3; 2 Timothy 2:24-25

CONCLUSION – Seeing Jesus Today

1 Corinthians 12:27

HOME CHURCH QUESTIONS...

WARMING UP...

1. Take time to review this week’s message. What things in the message most challenged, puzzled, or encouraged you?

LOOK TO THE BOOK...

2. Read our key passage (Philippians 2:12-30), in various translations if possible. a) What verse or idea stands out to you the most? Why? b) Using Paul’s thoughts in verses 12-13 as a launching pad, practice explaining how the Gospel of Jesus offers an alternative to all religion. c) What are some ways that you sense God working in you “to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose”? d) How much of a problem do you have with “grumbling or arguing”? What scenarios tempt you to argue or complain inappropriately? Are there times when a Christian should argue? e) Learn from each other – What are some things you find help you “hold firmly to the word of life”? f) Based on what you see in the text, what contributions do you think Timothy and Epaphroditus would bring to your Home Church experience?

SO WHAT?...

3. Recall the conclusion and read 1 Corinthians 12:27. What part of the Body of Christ do you see that yourself as? How could you better play your part to bless others? Pray for each other that you fulfill all God has called you to.

GOING FURTHER...

4. Some people think only John’s Gospel highlight’s Jesus’ divinity. Read Mark 12:1-12 and discuss how Jesus reveals his unique status in this parable.

Bruxy Cavey @ THE MEETING HOUSE – Sunday, July 15 / 22 , 2007