

Text: Phil 2.19-30
St Stephen's

Jan 30/31, 2010
Weekend Worship

'He Works In, We Work Out'

We are looking at Philippians, and particularly two cities where there were problems. There were **problems in Rome**: Paul was in jail – he lost his freedom, was under threat of execution, needed food and supplies and help...

And there were **problems back in Philippi**: worry about Paul, anxiety and even shame at his situation, competition from other would be apostles, there were fractures in their church and now they were facing some serious persecution in their own home town.

When there are problems, it seems like Paul always takes people **back to the gospel and remind us how it works**. That's what chapter 2 is all about and that's what we are doing today. Bill looked at this passage last week, and I want to start with what he focused on, because it is so important.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though in the form of God... made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men... he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross

Phil 2.5-8

This is Paul's famous summary **how the world was saved**. The Son of God **gave up everything** and **stepped down**.

- **Gave up**: equality with God – honor and privilege and position and security.
- **Came all the way down**: note the **mile markers** –made himself nothing – born as a man – became a servant – humbled himself – obedient – death on a cross.

He did this to be '**with us**'. But he also did this '**for us**'. Someone can be 'with you' but not 'for you'. We all know what that is like. The whole

point about 'death on the cross' – he did that 'for us'. But that's not all - He came to live '**in us**'. He actually comes to dwell inside every believer, and infect us, transform us, from the inside out. That is what gift of the Holy Spirit is all about... That's the gospel: '**Christ with us**', '**for us**', '**in us**'.

There is a **hint** of that in this paragraph, too. *'Have this mind... which is yours'...* **Wait**, when did that happen? 'Mine'? When did I get this mind, this attitude?

Well, when you **received him**, you received **all of him**. Alive, in you. His attitude, his mind, his heart, his character. It's all yours. His humility. His obedience. His holiness. His self-sacrificing, serving, 'give it all away' life.

Then Paul goes on to tell them how this all comes together...

Therefore, my beloved... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Phil 2.12-13

God works in you. You work it out. **Jesus works it in, I work it out.** That's the **pattern**. That's the **partnership**. You don't have to work out anything that he doesn't work in. You don't ever have to do anything that he isn't doing. He does all the heavy lifting. You can't do it without him. But He won't do it without you. You become his partner. His friend. He works it in, we work it out.

I **ride a mountain bike** a lot, and to go up some of the steep hills my legs have to work in a close partnership. First one, then the other. But when I am getting ready to go up a sharp incline, I will always lead with my right foot. It's my dominant foot. My stronger foot. My right foot leads and my left foot comes in behind. That is a picture of my partnership with the Lord. He leads and I follow. He is dominant, and I come along behind him.

He works it in, we work it out. He works in...

Forgiveness... you work it out, you forgive people around you.

Purity

Patience

Self-control

Generosity

Servanthood

Paul finishes this chapter with two **examples** of this **'work in-work out' partnership**, a couple of real people who were prominent in the partnership between Philippi and Paul.

The first is **Timothy**.

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you... you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.

Phil 2.19,22

Timothy was a special partner to Paul. His **Mom and Grandmother** were devout Jews who became believers in Jesus, and it seems **Timothy came to faith when they did**. Sometime after that he **met Paul**, who befriended him, invested in him, mentored him, disciplined him. He kind of **adopted him**, and Timothy became his spiritual son.

Timothy went on **mission trips** with Paul, and planted churches with Paul. Paul sent him to young congregations to disciple new believers, sort out church conflicts, raise up leaders, handle finances, and set an example in how to live for Jesus. Eventually Timothy co-authored about half of Paul's letters, and now he is being **sent to Philippi** to inform them about Paul's own situation and pastor them through a trying time. He was a tested young leader, and Paul could write, *you know Timothy's proven worth* – and they did. Paul could trust him with anything.

But here is **what he loves most** about Timothy:

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.

Phil 2.20-21

He is '***genuinely concerned for your welfare***'. What a great thing to say about a young Christian. You know what he is saying – in a world where everyone is **looking out for '#1'**, Timothy was different.

He is '*seeking Christ's interests*'. What **Christ cared about was all those others**. So he was ready to serve. Looking out for them before looking out for himself.

*in humility **count others more significant than yourselves**. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also **to the interests of others**.*

Phil 2.3-4

Christ's interests had been poured into him. And he was working them out.

One of our new Bishops in the new Province is a guy named **Todd Hunter**. He was converted to Christ in the Jesus movement in S Calif some 6 years after his life was shattered at his brother's death in Vietnam. It was finally that incident that drew him to the cross, where he found that '*greater love has no man than to give his life for another*'. His brother's sacrificial death led him to Jesus' sacrificial death which led him to Jesus' life which led him to Jesus' love. He wrote a book this past year. Its subtitle grabbed me: '***Following Jesus for the sake of others***.' Todd is working out what God is working in.

The second snapshot is a guy with a funny name:

Epaphroditus

He was someone who lived in Philippi, but who had been sent to Paul in Rome. We **don't know much** more about him than these sentences. We don't know how or when he became a Christian. Paul opens his sentences on Epaphroditus with some **high praise**:

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...

Phil 2.25

I imagine him as a steady guy, a dependable kind of guy, a 'get it done' kind of guy who had helped Paul out before and had come to help him out again. That's what Paul meant by '*your messenger and minister to my need...*'

What had happened was that Philippi heard about **Paul**. They know he's **in trouble in Rome**. He's got no support, no friends, no food, clothing or support. Not in Roman jails – they didn't feed you hardly anything or provide things for you – that was up to your friends. And Philippi wanted to help, so they took an offering and gathered up a **large and generous gift**. They wanted to **send it to Paul**. But it would not be easy to do that. Rome was 800 miles from Philippi, a 6 week trip **overland**, from Pittsburgh to Maine. It would be long and exhausting and dangerous. And they were carrying a lot of money. They needed a Fed-Ex guy, a 'get it done' guy to go on difficult, dangerous journey.

Probably they sent **several men, and Epaphroditus led** the team.

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

Phil 2.27-30

What Paul implies is that he **fell ill along the way and almost died**. M Lloyd Jones thinks he was **laid up** for as much as **three months**. Probably someone from the team took word to Philippi and they were worried as the weeks went by and no further word followed.

Then **he got better**, and Paul says it was the **sheer mercy of God**. Because he had been at death's door. And **then**, instead of heading back home from this almost disastrous trip, Epaphroditus **puts himself at risk again and completes his mission**, bringing their gift to Paul.

he nearly died for the work of Christ risking his life to complete it

Paul sees something here. He sees the shape of the **cross**. He smells the aroma of **sacrifice**. He catches sight of Epaphroditus **working out what Christ has worked in**.

He **commends** him: *'**receive** him in the Lord with all joy, and **honor such men***. A lot of you fit that phrase, 'such men', 'such women'. You are pouring out your lives for the one who poured out his life for you. It is a beautiful thing! God honors you for that.

So Paul sends this letter back to Philippi with Epaphroditus. And we know **he made it safely home**. Why? Because we have the letter he took with him.

God includes Epaphroditus in the bible because he wants to show that a **regular person** with a **new nature** can be trusted with a **significant task** for God that brings **amazing results – in spite of real hardships and risks**.

Two Q's: What is Jesus pouring into you? Nothing? **Give him your sin and ask him** for a new nature, a new life, a new heart. He gives these things to every single person who comes to him in repentance and in faith. And if you have made that start, then **don't lose sight** of what he really is pouring into you: his own character, his life, his nature, his wisdom, his strength, his attitude, his interests, his love for lost people... lean on him, draw on him...

What is Jesus working out through you? God says he is at work in you, and as Bill reminded us last week, it gives him pleasure to do this. Great pleasure. Maybe he has given you a task. You might be his Fed-Ex servant. It might be to raise your kids for him. To be his witness in your place of employment, to learn how to have his generosity or faithfulness or courage or dependability. Maybe he has given you a task that is not yet complete, maybe you've gotten stuck or ill along the way. Maybe it has just cost an awful lot. He is asking you to complete this mission for him. **Can you recommit to that today?**