

### *Philippians 2:12-18*

One of the most frustrating things is to pour a whole lot of work and energy into something only to conclude at the end of the day that it was just a waste of time. The desire to avoid such frustration, in a nut shell, is what is driving the plea of the apostle Paul to his friends in Philippi in this short passage which we have read together this morning.

I don't know if you often think about that great day when we will all stand before the Lord Jesus Christ when he returns to this world as King and judge of all men and women. But, I can tell you, the more we read the New Testament the more we are compelled to think of that day. Paul calls it in verse 16: "*The day of Christ.*" And he says when that day comes and you Philippian people are called before the throne of Almighty God I want to be able to boast that I did not waste my time planting and building a church.

See what he says, if you look at verse 16: "*in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour for nothing.*" You know it really does focus the mind somewhat doesn't it if we think about our church here at the North Parish in Stirling or up in High Church, Hilton in Aberdeen or wherever it is we belong. And we say, well what's it going to be like, when God winds up history on that great and last day, and ushers in a new era for his people.

Are we going to be people who say, look it was all worth it? As God one day unveils his completed kingdom and banishes all evil and darkness from his sight for ever. And people bow before Jesus Christ and proclaim him as Lord, what will our voices be heard to be saying? Will our voices be like this as we look at other Christians whom we have nurtured and lived alongside? Fellow members of the family? Our own children, grandchildren, friends. We have not run the race in vain. Or, well what a waste of time that was. Boasting on the day of Christ. Sinless and full of joy. If that is to be the case, what will cause it?

Well the great news of this passage, is that it is God himself who is utterly committed to preparing us for the day when he will present his children, the living Church, to Jesus Christ his Son, as a perfect bride. Could you just look down at verses 12 and thirteen so that we all see this great fact expressed clearly.

"*Therefore,*" In other words in the light of everything Paul has said about the Lord Jesus Christ in verses 5-11. "*Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*" Do you see the wonderful gospel logic of this, which is the opposite to how we often think.

Just the other day two of us from our church in Aberdeen met with a Chinese girl who has been coming to church for a year and is really thinking about becoming a Christian believer. Like many from her country she had never heard the gospel in her life or been in a church before she came here to study. And I asked her how her thinking was progressing and what she had been reading about in her Bible. And it was just so very telling when she said, I read a book recently which explained everything to me. I read a book with lots of laws in it. It told me to love other people and to be kind to others. And it said, *if* I live in this way then I will be happy and peaceful and more likely to be successful. Is that not just exactly like the Bible she said?

What do you think? Does that sound like the Bible to you? ... I said to her. Well it does sound a little bit like the Bible because it speaks about loving other people. But actually, I think the book may actually be teaching you the very opposite of the Bible. 'Really?' she said. Why do

you think that?

Well, this book says *if* you live in a certain way, *then* you will be given certain things. And that's how people think all the time. And we just need to find the right way to live, in order to get what we want. But you know the Bible teaches us the very opposite to that. The good news of the gospel says, God gives us what we need first, his undeserved grace, and because we have received that, we then live in a certain way. One kind of teaching is teaching based on rules and rewards. It's full of pressure. Unless you do this, you will not get what you need.

But the other kind of teaching, the gospel kind of teaching, the Bible kind of teaching is based on grace and response and it's full of glorious freedom and joy. Because God has given me his gift, I will never lack any good thing. And on the day of Christ, I will boast in my Saviour and rejoice with his people.

Do you see this gospel kind of logic, in these Bible verses. Continue to work out your salvation. Because, it is God who is at work in you. Respond to Christ with obedience, because you have already received the gift of his Holy Spirit. You see?

If we look at the next couple of verses I want us to notice this logic as we see the response to God's amazing gift. For here, Paul does give a few principles for life in the Christian family doesn't he? Look please at verse 12: "*Do everything without complaining or arguing.*" mmm how many churches could spend a while on that text? Let's read on though: "*Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.*"

Lucy's baptism today is a wonderful reminder that we live as Christian people because of what God has already given us. So when Lucy is old enough to ask as many questions as Cameron does, and Calum and Moira-Anne have about two hundred and sixty questions before breakfast is finished: why do we have to do that Mummy? Don't argue with your sister Cameron, don't complain about your brother Lucy. Why Mummy, why shouldn't I complain. What is the answer? The answer is not, because if you complain I will take away your toys. Or, if you stop complaining I will give you ten pounds. The answer, ultimately, is because we are God's children, and because God has given us so much it is the wrong way to be. Jesus is here, and he hates that kind of thing.

As Christians we are people who have already received the best gift from the Saviour who loves them so deeply, and from a God who is committed to preparing us to be in his home in heaven for all of eternity. So to receive the grace of Jesus and be promised a place in heaven by God, means that it is preposterous for me to be an argumentative person who is known to complain all the time. For the reality about my life in this world, in the light of all that God has done for me, is that I don't really have anything to complain about. That's presumably why Paul can dare to be so comprehensive in his wording.

"*Do everything without complaining.*" That's not really how we think most of the time is it? We tend to think, we shout try not to complain too much, but sometimes things are just so grim that we've actually got jolly good ground for complaint. And then, well then of course, people will say to us, it's understandable. Everyone would complain in these circumstances, it would be unreasonable to expect you not to! And God says, unreasonable unless you belong to a Saviour who made himself nothing and took the very nature of a servant. One who humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. If we are loved by this Saviour then it makes

sense to do **everything** without complaining.

Oh, Paul says, to these dear friends of his who he loves so much, don't let your life as a church be a denial of the Lord Jesus Christ's presence in your midst. For you want people to see your fellowship together in the same way that they would admire the beauty of stars in a night which is pitch black.

Look we say, as we stand outside on a winter's night. Look at that. What a travesty and disaster when the Christian church is more known for holding out a begging bowl to the world round about it. Is that not what people think of when they think of the church? Save our church roof. Special sale for church funds. Jam and jumble: roll up roll up, the church says. We need your money. We need your help.

No God says, people should see your life as believers who live together in such a remarkable way that they, they who are outside, start saying, we need your help. We need your Saviour,. Whatever it is that you people have, that is what we need.

Hold out the word of life, and live together without complaint or argument, and on the day of Christ there will be all sorts of people boasting. Paul will say – how proud I am of these Philippians and how thrilled by everything that God has done in them.

But he says, and this is perhaps the most striking thing of all. But, whatever happens, verse 17, literally even if it kills me, *“Even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should rejoice with me.”*

You see Paul is committed to his Christian friends, in exactly the same way that Christ is committed to his people. That's what gives his words such authority and clout. The Apostle says, I'm not giving up on you, because God is not giving up on you. And God is not giving up on you because he is at work within you. And his work within you is the pledge that he will have every last one of you ready to meet his Son.

Life in the family of God is a life-long project which will end with great boasting on the day of Christ. And it is never ever a waste of time. For when Christ shall come with shouts of acclamation and take us home, what joy shall fill our hearts. Then we shall bow with humble adoration, and then proclaim, boast we could say, how great thou art. A big vision of God's great future plan for his children, and of Jesus Christ's majestic glory, will stop the family squabbles. And if doesn't? Maybe we're not in the family yet?