

## **WHCC 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2020**

### **Philippians 2; 12-30**

#### **'Be a star'**

#### **Readings;**

#### **Philippians 2; 12-30**

#### **Matthew 5; 3-16**

You have heard it said, where you see 'therefore' ask what is therefore therefore.

Well it means because of the preceding.

And what was that?

Michael told us last week; it was a plea from Paul for the Philippians to be likeminded and not to be acting out of selfish ambition. But I have asked myself over and over why Paul had concerns. After all, he seems to be very positive in his attitude towards the Christians at Philippi. His theme seems to be one of joy, yet he makes this plea. Why?

Well, if you look ahead to Chapter 4; v2, you see that all was not well in the Church of Philippi. Amongst other things, two of Paul's fellow workers had fallen out and were causing a break in the ranks. Michael illustrated very well in his sermon last week why it is necessary for Christians to stand shoulder

to shoulder in our fight against the world, the flesh and the devil. But here we have a serious breach so that Paul pleads with these two women to agree together, to be reconciled and to heal the breach. There may have been other issues as well because usually people take sides and there may have been a split that was greater than just the two women. But we know from experience that Christians do fall out from time to time and some leave their fellowship because they feel grieved.

So, as we saw last week, Paul pleads for unity and humility amongst the believers. He quotes what was either a hymn or a creed about Jesus, how He emptied Himself and took on the role of a lowly servant which culminated in His shameful and painful death on the Cross.

Therefore, Paul pleads with the believers at Philippi to obey him in the instructions he is about to give them.

The question could be asked, 'How can we as Christians live a life of humility and selfless service for our Saviour?

There are 5 things that Paul focuses on;

1. The first is obedience. Further on Paul reminds them that they live in a crooked and depraved world. The world is characterized by disobedience and rebellion. Tell people they should be obedient to God and they will scoff. But what of us? How do we react when told that we should be obedient? Paul pleads with his

people to live lives characterised by obedience- obedience to his teaching and of course, obedience to the Lord who he serves.

2. Secondly, he calls them to 'work out' their salvation. This of course does not mean work FOR your salvation simply because salvation is a free gift from God so it cannot be earned. But having said that, Paul asks them to 'work out their salvation with fear and trembling'. So what did he mean? He means to apply to our daily lives that great truth that we have been saved by Grace. If we have been saved by Grace, even though we deserve punishment and rejection by God, this must affect the way we think and act. We do live in a crooked and depraved world, just like the Philippians. In fact our world in some ways is more depraved because we have the benefits of good education, good health care, the knowledge of God and freedom. We of all people should be living a life that reflects all our advantages and privileges. However, this is not the case. Our society changes the rules by the day. Who can you trust? There is so much fake news. Our hearts quake at the nonsense that is being taught to our kids. So for us as believers in Jesus Christ, who have received the gift of eternal life through the forgiveness of our sins, we are to work this out through every aspect of our lives- in the way we treat others, especially those who we might think are not as good as us- through

forgiving others who have offend us just as we have been forgiven, by battling our addictions and weaknesses, by sharing the Good News with others as we get the opportunity and by yielding our whole life to the One who humbled Himself and died a shameful death on the Cross for us.

3. Then Paul calls them to be blameless. Perhaps you may think that this is not possible. The Bible does not teach sinless perfection but it does teach that we should be serious about not giving in to that which brings shame on us. Each of us knows our own weaknesses in a way that others don't know. When we are tempted to give in to our addictions and weaknesses, we have a choice- give in or fight back. You know this and I know this. It may be in big things or it may be in small things but Paul charges his people with being blameless. So in our dealings, especially with those who are not part of the Faith, we should always act with integrity so that we are blameless.
4. Fourthly, Paul says they are to shine as stars. You remember the words of Jesus; 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven'. Jesus also said that if the light in you is in fact darkness, how dark it is. I like this imagery of being a star. We think of stars as being entertainers or top sports people but each of us, filled with the Spirit of Jesus, can be like a star shining in

such a way that people actually warm to us even if they don't know us well. If the Church is filled with little stars, how bright it will be. If the Church is filled with grumbling and unbelief, how little light there will be.

5. Finally, Paul calls them to hold out the Word of Life to others. In this crooked and depraved world, shackled to a soldier in prison, Paul calls his people not to retreat and hide away and be fearful but to hold out the Word of Life to others. It is a natural reaction to withdraw from the world when we are scorned and mocked but he says this is the very time when we should shine and offer the word to others.

John Stott, in his commentary translates this phrase as 'Hold fast the word of life'. In talking this over, Lorraine and I felt that both are equally relevant. If we are to hold out the word of life, we must first of all holdfast the word of life. If we allow the word to be adulterated or watered down, what use is it to hold it out to others? So hold fast and hold out the word of life. That is our calling.

Paul reminds them of a very important truth in verse 13 – For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purposes.

Sometimes we feel weak and afraid. Sometimes we feel inadequate. Sometimes we feel like giving up because of our slow progress in holiness. Paul reminds us as well as his friends that we need to remember that

God is working out His purposes in us as in the world. Sometimes we wonder if God is really in control when we see horrible things happening but the truth is that God is working out His purposes in us, in the Church and in the world. Take heart then and let us yield our hearts and minds and wills to the Lord who has so loved us and given Himself for us.

In the second part of this passage, Paul speaks of two men who are a blessing to him; Timothy who he says is like a son to him and Epaphroditus who is a brother to Paul and a fellow worker, a soldier and trusted messenger. Epaphroditus was ill and very nearly died but had recovered, He was one of the Philippians so Paul was sending him back to them to share the news. Paul urges them to receive him back with joy as he had risked his very life for the Gospel.

Questions for Home groups;

1. How do you understand what Paul meant when he said; 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling'.
2. If it is true that St Paul was writing because of the split that the two women were causing, how do you think the Church should handle such conflicts?
3. How can we shine as stars in the present age?
4. How can we rejoice in the Lord, even when we experience suffering?