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# GRIPPED BY THE GOSPEL: JOY IN SACRIFICE

*Philippians 2:12-30*

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## INTRODUCTION

*"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it... Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." - Matt. 16:24-25, Luke 14:33*

What did Jesus mean by renouncing all that he has? Is it time? Money? Possessions? It's more than that. It means letting go all that this world has to offer and clinging to Jesus Christ. Even if that means losing your life. Why in the world would anyone follow Jesus then? Why would anyone give up all that they have to follow someone else? Who would do such a thing? It doesn't appear to be a life of fun and happiness. Yet, this is exactly what Jesus call us to. Forsake all this world has to offer, deny yourself and come follow Him. For those in here who have said yes to Jesus and no to the world, we wrestle with this calling. How do we renounce all as we live in one of the wealthiest countries in the world? We have all that we need and so much more. This morning, we are going to learn what it means to forsake all that we have and live a cross-centered life. Before we begin, let's pray.

We will be moving through the second half of chapter 2, verse 12-30. To review, Paul had exhorted the Philippian church to live as citizens of heaven. He wrote that citizens of heaven stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. In addition, citizens of heaven are not selfish, and they do not try to impress others. They are humble and count others more significant than themselves. That's a pretty high calling.

Yet, we see pictures of this in our society. We see it in sports teams. They stand firm, working together, giving of themselves, striving for the same goal. We also see it our armed forces. Men and women, working diligently and painfully to learn to live and die together for the sake of others. In fact, they are the closest example of what Paul was asking the church in Philippi to be. But a church is different. At least with the armed forces you have some idea of what you are getting yourself into.

But for most of us, I don't think we were sure what we were in for when we committed our lives to Christ. Jesus said to count the cost, but did we really?

Many of us may not have chosen the people in this room to be in partnership for the gospel. We may have chosen others with the same interests or close friends. But God chose each and every one of you to live together as citizens of heaven. Therefore, it is going to take something supernatural in order for us to work with a unified purpose in a self-sacrificing way for each other. So, how does one live this way? Paul gives us some help in this letter. As we have been learning, it is a life that is gripped by the gospel.

Look with me at verse 12. It starts with "therefore." In other words, for this reason. This prompts us to look back at the previous verses 5-11. It would do us well to commit these to memory. Let's read them again.

<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is one the greatest pieces ever written of Jesus. It is theologically packed with much to comprehend. Countless pieces have written in exegeting this passage. But it also sets forth an example, or as Paul says, a mindset that will take a lifetime to fully comprehend. There is no comparison to what Christ did. It leaves us no excuse why we can't serve others. And, having this mindset, is the only way we can live a cross-kind of life. Without this mindset, we cannot obey out of grace. We cannot take up our cross and follow Him. Oh, we may obey the rules, but it will be driven by law and not grace. When we take the time to meditate on these verses, our hearts will be gripped, and we will live out what we believe. We will live as citizens of heaven. But it will not be easy. We are born Adam's and Eve's. We born and bred to live exalting in and for ourselves and for our own glory. So, it is going to take work. Let's pick up verse 12.

## AN APPEAL FOR THEIR OBEDIENCE (V.12-13)

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The meat of this sentence is the following, "Therefore, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..." Paul's exhortation to obey is working out their salvation. Obedience takes work. But this obedience, again, is not for salvation but out of salvation. Because they are saved, they will work out this salvation in practical living. Hence, Paul knows that following Christ is not a simple set of rules and regulations. But rather it is much more than that. It is working out what it means to renounce all that he has and take up your cross and follow Jesus. This is another reason why Paul prayed in chapter 1, that their "**love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,** <sup>10</sup> so that you may approve what is excellent." In other words, so that they will know how to live together, in this world as citizens of heaven.

It takes work in prayer and takes work with each other. Remember, this letter was to the saints and overseers and deacons. It was to be done in community. When the elders meet to discuss finances or church challenges, we are working out this salvation. When we attend worship, ABE classes, flock, or other ministries, we are working out this salvation. When we fellowship with one another, seek wise counsel from each other, serve with one another in various ministries. We are working out our salvation. Working out our salvation is a team sport. It is not done in isolation.

## WHEN (12A) [IN HIS ABSENCE]

But notice at the beginning of this verse, Paul exhorts them to continue to obey, not only like they did when he was there, but it is even more so in his absence. There is an old proverb that says, "When the cat is away the mouse will play." Meaning, when the authority is away, people will do as they please. Now this church was not disobedient because Paul was not there. He says they always obeyed as in his presence. Paul knows God is already

working in them! He has seen it in their gifts to him, their prayers for him, and in sending one of their own, who risked his life for him. But he exhorts them to do this with fear and trembling.

## HOW (12B) [IN THEIR UNIFIED EFFORTS]

This fear and trembling is not the motivator. It's not, "Obey or the wrath of God will come down on you." Let's be clear here, Christ bore the wrath of God for our sin so that we would be free to obey. This refers to a sober attitude that results from recognizing both our own inadequacy and the life-or-death significance of the situation in which we find ourselves. We don't obey out of fear of God but rather we recognize the only way we can live like citizens of heaven is by complete and utter dependence on the power of God, the Holy Spirit within us. It is only by the grace of God we obey to begin with.

## WHY (13) [IN FAITH IN GOD'S WORK]

It is the fact that both our willing and our doing lie beyond our own resources and can be found only in God's working that makes this whole project a matter of "fear and trembling." Why are you here this morning? Most of us made a deliberate effort to prepare ourselves to come here this morning or to listen from a different location. Some of you came with great enthusiasm and excitement. Others, maybe not so much. Either way, you are here, both because you made an effort and because God is at work in you.

There may be times in our walk with Christ, when you feel like giving up. There may be times when you wonder why you keep going, and you wonder, "Is it really worth it?" You become consumed with doubt. But you find yourself continuing. You find yourself here every Sunday despite those feelings. Why? Because Christ is in you! He is working in you! Praise God it is not dependent on us alone! This is the fight of faith. Those who think have the mind of Christ, trust God in their efforts for obedience. Listen, God has saved you, is saving you, and will save you! Rejoice in that!

## AN ATTITUDE TOWARD OBEDIENCE (V.14A)

That leads us to verse 14. <sup>14</sup> ***Do all things without grumbling or disputing,***

The mighty power of God is present in every believer through the Holy Spirit. And he is working within you. So, do everything without grumbling or disputing.

That's a command. It's easy tell our children to memorize this verse. We taught our children, "Obey right away, without delay, all the way, with a happy attitude." Until I realized as I looked into the mirror, I wasn't emulating this exact attitude in my own obedience. I realized I was asking my children to do something I couldn't do myself.

But this is exactly what Paul is calling the Philippians to do! This is why we need the attitude of Christ.

Think of this: If God is working all things together, if He is orchestrating all the situations and events in our lives for our good and His glory, then why would we complain or argue with others? It's because we don't believe God and His Word. But, citizens of heaven, work this out with one another. This is a daily battle between the Spirit and the flesh. It is only overcome by rehearsing the gospel to yourself and keeping a heavenly perspective. It comes from sacrificing our own personal desires and agendas, in order to prefer others. And there is a greater joy that

is received from the sacrifice. This is what the Son of God did, and this is how the children of God should respond. The obedience that results from God's working his rescue deep into our hearts will be shown in an extraordinary reaction to the pressures of a dominant and unsympathetic cultural establishment. Instead of accommodation, retaliation, isolation, or internal conflict, Jesus' followers will engage one another and their non-Christian neighbors with patient and selfless contentment, neither grumbling in self-pity nor questioning God's purpose.

You see, in every situation and trial, we need to remember the examples that God has given us in His Word. Remember Deuteronomy 8:2-6? As Moses prepares the Israelites before entering the Promised Land, he reminds them it was God who had led them in the wilderness, that he might humble them, testing them to know what was in their heart, whether, they would keep His commandments or not. As He did humble them, He let them hunger and fed them with manna, so that they would know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Moses reminds them that their clothing did not wear out and their feet didn't swell. He wants them to see God's kindness and care for them in the wilderness, in the struggle.

Then he says, "know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you. So, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his way and by fearing Him." Why are we to do this? For the gospel, not only in the present, but also for the future of Christ's return. Read with me from 14 on.

## AN ARGUMENT FOR THEIR OBEDIENCE (V.15-16A)

*<sup>14</sup> Do all things without grumbling or disputing, <sup>15</sup> that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, <sup>16</sup> holding fast to the word of life,*

### BE WHO YOU ARE (15)

Paul says they are to be different than the world. This once again refers back to Paul's beginning pray in chapter 1. Remember? He says,

*<sup>9</sup> And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment...and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.*

This was Paul's prayer and this is Paul's exhortation. Be different than the world. Be blameless and innocent. Be children of God. Only a child of God will have the mind of God. Only a child of God will think like his Father. Only a child of God will emulate the one he spends his and efforts pursuing.

The wilderness generation "grumbled against Moses" (Ex. 15:24; 16:2) and against the Lord himself (16:7-8). Moses somberly described those Israelites as "no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation" (Deut. 32:5). Don't be the Israelites! Look to the one Israelite and believe upon Him! The world is crooked and twisted. Don't be surprised. And don't be surprised how you look to the world. You should look different and be treated differently because your citizenship is in heaven.

### PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL (16A)

And, once again, Paul tells us this is done by holding fast to God's Word and remembering what He has done for you. Remember his care and kindness toward you as you walk in the wilderness of life, longing for the day that

you enter into the eternal rest on the day of Christ. Remember that you are a son or daughter of the Living God. And He loves you so much that He is training and preparing you.

In this way, you will shine as lights in the world, as you keep your eyes on the light of the world, Jesus the author and finisher of your faith, what for the joy set before Him endured the cross. Brothers and sisters, there is joy set before us, so let us obey in a believing way.

## THREE EXAMPLES

We end this section with three examples. Paul already gave us the perfect example, now we read of three others. First, the submissive servant.

### AN EXAMPLE OF A SUBMISSIVE SERVANT<sup>1</sup> (V.16B-18)

*<sup>17</sup> Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. <sup>18</sup> Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.*

Paul is following Christ's example as he is willing to pour out his own life for the sake of their faith. Paul's metaphor of being poured out as a drink offering is an allusion to an Old Testament scene. As one writer describes, "In the ancient sanctuary, the daily morning and evening burnt offerings were accompanied by "drink offerings." Before the fire was lit to incinerate the slain lamb, a priest poured wine over the victim to enhance the "pleasing aroma to the LORD" (Num. 28:7-8; see Phil. 4:18).

Although both lamb and wine were consumed in consecration to the Lord, the lamb itself was central. This is Paul's point when he now speaks of being "poured out . . . on the sacrificial offering of your faith." He was only enhancing the faith of the Philippians. He was not the central figure. Paul rejoices in sacrificing for this church and he wants the Philippian Church to rejoice with him. This is because it is all God's work.

The prospect of seeing people living their lives for God's glory, whatever the cost, turns serious suffering into sheer celebration: "I am glad and rejoice with you all" (2:17). Here again, in the context of suffering and the prospect of impending death, the apostle sounds the recurring note of joy that runs like a golden thread through the tapestry of the epistle.<sup>2</sup> Paul was a submissive servant. Now we read of a selfless servant.

### AN EXAMPLE OF SELFLESS SERVANT (V.19-24)

*<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. <sup>20</sup> For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. <sup>21</sup> For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. <sup>23</sup> I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, <sup>24</sup> and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.*

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<sup>1</sup> The following headings were taken from Dennis Johnson's *Philippians (Reformed Expository Commentary)*.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, Dennis. "Bright Stars in a Dark Night (Phil. 2:12-18)." *Philippians (Reformed Expository Commentary)*, Richard D. Phillips, Philip Ryken, Kindle, P & R Publishing, 2013, 166.

Paul wants to send Timothy. He says, "I have no one like him." There's nobody better to send to you. He is the best I've got. What sets Timothy apart from all the others? He is genuinely concerned for their welfare. Others seek their own interests. Others would gladly go for Paul because they see it as an opportunity to seize the church.

Not Timothy, he is proven himself. He has their spiritual well-being as his drive not their physical well-being. Timothy has the mind of Christ. He too, took the form as a servant to Jesus by serving Paul and the Philippians. In humility, he counts others more significant than himself. He is a proven Christ follower. We have read about the submissive servant, the selfless servant, now we'll read about the suffering servant. Read with me starting in verse 25.

### AN EXAMPLE OF SUFFERING SERVANT (V.25-30)

*<sup>25</sup>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, <sup>26</sup>for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. <sup>27</sup>Indeed 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. <sup>28</sup>I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. <sup>29</sup>So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, <sup>30</sup>for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.*

This letter Paul has written will be delivered by Epaphroditus. While Paul considers Timothy a son, which does not or should not cause us to think any less of Timothy, notice how he refers to Epaphroditus.

He is a brother, an equal to Paul. He is a fellow worker, operating on the same power of grace as Paul and he is a fellow soldier, fighting the same fight of faith as Paul. He also put his life on the line for the work of Christ. Epaphroditus is the messenger and minister from the Philippians, his is one of their own, sent to Paul's need. Epaphroditus risked his life for the gospel. Notice too, how he reacted when the Philippians knew of his illness, he was distressed. He didn't bring attention to himself. He didn't want them to worry.

Men and women who have the mind of Christ, take no thought for their lives when serving for the gospel. Now, I am not advocating we all go out devise ways to deliberately risk your life for the gospel. Nor am I advocating to work ourselves to death serving. But, when you are gripped by the gospel, you will make decisions in serving with a heavenly mindset. And, you will find great joy in renouncing all for the gospel serving others. These are the men who are doing the work. They were serving sacrificially, and they were not grumbling and disputing. Let's wrap up.

### REFLECT AND RESPOND

I began this message with Jesus' teaching on the cost of discipleship. And this is where I end it.

*<sup>25</sup>Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. <sup>26</sup>Anyone who wants to serve me must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me. - John 12:25-26*

Following Jesus is costly. It may cost us our time, money, and possessions. But more importantly it may cost us our lives. Remember, to live is Christ and to die is gain. By reflecting on Jesus, the gospel, and our great salvation in Christ we willing lay down our lives others with great joy. Because the we know that Jesus, is that one great pearl that is worth selling all that we have in order to follow him. Be gripped by the gospel.