

Growing in Maturity

Philippians 2:1-13

May 7-8, 2016

We come now to Paul's letter to the church in the city of Philippi. Paul and Silas started this church on Paul's second missionary journey. They had been traveling through the area of Asia minor, modern day Turkey, when Paul had a vision that a man from Macedonia was calling out to him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Paul concluded that God was directing them to Macedonia through that vision.

The area of Macedonia was the mainland just north of Greece. The city of Philippi was named after the father of Alexander the Great, Philip, who had wanted to unify Macedonia and Greece into one great nation, but it was his son Alexander the Great who accomplished that and conquered much of the known world.

After receiving that vision, Paul and his companions put out to sea from Troas and ran a straight course across the Mediterranean. Within a few days they reached Philippi, the leading city of that district and a Roman colony.

On the Sabbath they went out to the riverside supposing there would be a place of prayer and began speaking to those who had assembled there. A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple fabrics, was listening and the Lord opened her heart to receive Christ. She and her household were baptized.

So far it's a wonderful story, but it's about to take a terrible turn, but as we'll see, God can take tragedy and turn it into triumph; He brings beauty out of ashes.

A certain slave girl, having a spirit of divination, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling, was following after Paul and his companions and she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." She kept doing this for many days and finally Paul became greatly annoyed. He turned and said to the demon spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out that very moment.

When her master saw their hope of profit was gone, they took hold of Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities, the chief magistrates, and said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which is not lawful for us to accept or observe, being Romans."

A crowd rose up against them so the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to have them beaten with rods. When they had inflicted many blows they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there came a great

earthquake and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. The jailer took out his sword to kill himself, supposing the prisoners had escaped, but Paul stopped him. Trembling with fear, the jailer fell down before Paul and Silas and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

That very hour the jailer took them to his home and washed their wounds and he and his entire household received the word of God and were baptized; having believed.

There's a principle here that we should take hold of and apply to our lives as well. Many people are offended by God when they encounter troubles. In fact, it was just in the news this week that a man in Israel was seeking a restraining order against God because he believed that God had not treated him kindly. Needless to say the case was thrown out of court.

Paul sees such troubles as opportunities for God to work in his life through those difficult circumstances. In the first part of this letter he wrote, "*I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.*" What circumstances was he referring to?

As soon as Paul arrived in Jerusalem a riot broke out so the Roman soldiers took him into protective custody. They then discovered a plot to kill him so they sent Paul to Caesarea where he sat in

prison for years without facing charges. Finally, he appealed to Caesar and was sent by ship to Rome. On the way a hurricane force storm battered the ship for two full weeks until all hope was lost. They were then shipwrecked and had to swim for the island of Malta. The locals built a bonfire and when Paul threw some sticks into the fire, a viper latched onto his hand. He simply shook it off into the fire. The locals were so taken by Paul that a great revival broke out.

Some years later while Paul was waiting in Rome as a prisoner, he wrote this letter to the church in Philippi. The church had heard of his troubles and sent a financial gift to help him; they had great respect for Paul. He writes to thank them and to strengthen their faith and draw them to maturity.

I. Humility is Godly Maturity

- Paul knew there was encouragement in Christ, consolation of love, fellowship of the Spirit, and affection and compassion in the church; that's a wonderful thing, but Paul wants more for them.
- "Make my joy complete," Paul wrote, by uniting in spirit and love, intent on one purpose.
- When a church is healthy it's a beautiful thing, but God wants more for them.

Philippians 1:6, He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

- In order for us to grow in our faith and in the maturity of Christ, we need to have an attitude of humility.
- We weren't born this way; we were born completely selfish and self-centered. Something has to change, there has to come a shift from how we were born to what God wants us to become.

A. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit

- That in itself is a remarkable statement because it's completely opposite of our natural state of being. We were born completely selfish and self-centered and it's very common for people to continue in that state all the rest of their lives.

Illus - It was also seen in the church; for many years people could 'sponsor' a pew in the church and would have their name plate installed at the end so no one would sit in 'their' pew.

- God is speaking about this because He knows that selfishness and empty conceit does not make a person fulfilled in their soul, or happy, or blessed.

Illus - Have you ever met a spoiled child? We have another word for it, a spoiled brat. Why? Because they're not happy and no one around them is either.

- Can you imagine how unhappy and unhealthy a marriage would be if both people were always selfish?
- Can you imagine how unhappy and unhealthy a church would be if everyone was self-focused and self-centered?

James 3:16-17, For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits...

B. Regard others as more important than yourself

- We are now touching on one of the deepest most important issues to the heart of God for us. If we can take hold of this and truly apply it to our lives, we have taken hold of one of God's deepest truths.
- If pride and selfishness is the root and foundation of all that is sinful and hurtful, then humility of mind is the root and foundation of all that is good and godly.

- Paul writes that humility in mind is what allows a person to regard others as more important than himself. What is humility in mind?
- One definition might be, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less.” However, that’s not a common attitude.

Illus - to quote the famous American philosopher, Mac Davis, “Oh Lord, it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way. I can’t wait to look in the mirror, I get better lookin’ each day.”

- Why should we regard others as more important than ourselves if it’s not the natural way of thinking? Answer; because it’s the spiritual way of thinking.

Matthew 23:11-12, “The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.”

- In other words, humility is part of faith. If you believe God’s word, then you believe that these principles are empowered by God Himself.

James 4:6, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

James 4:10, Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

- Those who exalt themselves, will be humbled; God will see to that Himself.
- I can give you several examples of that very thing from my own life, although it's more fun telling about how God humbled someone else. But, although it's embarrassing, I'll use myself as an illustration.

Illus - When I was 21 I was given an amazing opportunity to become manager and 49% partner in an Elmer's restaurant franchise. It was literally being given to me, but God taught me a hard lesson in humility.

Illus - Years later, I was part owner of a local restaurant and one-day God used me to help someone else come back to earth a bit...

C. Jesus is our example

- Verse 5 – have this attitude in you which was also in Christ Jesus... He Himself is the example of the attitude of heart that God will bless. Humble yourselves -in the sight of God- and He will lift you.
- Jesus sat at the right hand of the Father and, although He existed in the very nature of God, He did not consider equality with God a

thing to be held on to, but emptied Himself; He set aside those privileges and took on the form of a bondservant.

- Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. By His death, and by His suffering, our sins were paid in their entirety.
- In other words, He did it for us. What humility, what love, what maturity of Spirit. He is our example.
- Jesus embodies the perfect definition of maturity. **Immaturity** is favoring one's self at the expense of others. We're all familiar with that because we've done it many times. **Maturity** is favoring others at the expense of self and there is no greater example of that than Jesus Christ Himself.
- And because Jesus humbled himself so profoundly, the principle holds true, God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name which is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord.
- How do you become great in the kingdom of God? Answer; become like the king. Jesus humbled Himself to such a great depth that

God highly exalted Him. He asks us to follow His example.

- Jesus didn't just lower Himself to become a man, He lowered Himself to become a servant.

Illus – Here's God's heart, "I wash feet." You've no doubt heard the expression, "I don't do windows." What is that mean? *It means, I won't lower myself to that.* Jesus washed the feet of the disciples and gave us an example. In fact, it's what makes us like Him.

John 13:8, 14, Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.... If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."

- Jesus washed Peter's feet, knowing he would deny Him. He washed Thomas's feet, knowing he would doubt Him; He washed Judas' feet, knowing he would betray Him.

D. God is at work in you

- Verses 12-13; work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

- Notice he didn't say work *for* your salvation; he said to work out your salvation. In other words, God has given the gift of salvation, of righteousness, of grace and kindness; let that now work its way into every area of your life.
- God is at work in you, Paul wrote. He who began a good work will complete it.
- God doesn't just give us the gift of salvation and then say, "*Wonderful, welcome to the kingdom, be sure to visit me twice a year, I look forward to seeing you at Christmas and Easter.*"
- God loves you so much that not only does He give you the gift of eternal life, He also gives you the gift of a transformed life; and He won't quit 'til the day you meet Him face-to-face.