

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Really?!

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Scripture:

Philippians 2:12-16 (NRSV)

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence but much more now in my absence, work on your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world, holding forth the word of life so that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the service of your faith, I rejoice, and I rejoice together with all of you; in the same way also you should rejoice and rejoice together with me.

Transcript:

Well, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Colin. I'm the kids and students pastor here. And thank you. I'll take it. No, that means I get to hang out with your kids and your students all the time. And I really, really love it. So thank you for the opportunity that I get to do that. And I'm also excited I get to be with you here today doing this. Let's pray again, real quick. God made the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be worthy in your sight. You are our rock and our Redeemer. It's in your holy precious name we pray. Amen. Let me start off by telling you a story. In 1988, the Buffalo Bills appeared to have turned the corner as a franchise. They had assembled the most amazing team. One that commentators were saying was supposed to be able to go all the way, that the super bowls was theirs.

And instead they ended up going 12 and four. They lost the AFC championship game, but they seemed poised to make it again in 1989. You Mariners fan, you're used to this feeling so go with me. But that run would be delayed, sorry, Mariners. Anyway, the Bills ended up finishing

nine and seven in 89. And afterwards tumultuous season where they had earned the moniker, the bickering Bills from the media and the fans, the rumors ... And this was because there were so many significant rumors of infighting and conflict among the players and the coaches. Well, what led to this? Glad you asked. In the off season, there were a bunch of personnel moves that really caused a downward spiral. Some key players who actually helped the team culture were no longer there. And during an early season loss, the wide receiver got into it on the sidelines with the quarterback. And a few days later, the Bills just cut them.

And in another mistake filled game where the quarterback had his shoulder separated, he started publicly blaming his offensive line for his injury. And after all of that verbal jabs actually took a backseat, when two assistant coaches started physically brawling as they were reviewing game film, because that's totally normal, right?

Despite all of this, because they were still a talented team, they ended up, excuse me, this light is challenging. Okay. Despite all of that, the Bills clinched their division in the final week when they beat the Jets, but they lost the wild card round when they dropped the winning touchdown, as they were getting into the end zone. This team that by all accounts was supposed to be able to go all the way wasn't able to get anywhere because they were plagued by controversy and infighting. And it actually kept them to be able to focus on what it was they were actually there to do. Which was to work together and win football games. Well, that same dynamic is in our text for today. Paul, who was in prison is writing to his friends and fellow Christians in Philippi. And in it, he urges them to put it to the internal disputes that are within the community of believers.

And his rationale is that these disputes are actually taking them away from their calling. It's keeping them from what their actual purpose is, which is to be a witness to the Pagan culture around them and share the good news of Jesus Christ so that others may know him and the salvation he brings. While Paul doesn't give us this big, long laundry list of everything that they're fighting about, it's pretty clear that as we track the arc of his letter, that this is the reason for him writing. In the opening of his letter, he makes the comment that their public behavior isn't matching up with the gospel that they say that they believe in.

He then calls them to stand firm in the same spirit, that to struggle side by side, with united intent to share the gospel. He continues that their shared life about should be marked by holding onto the same love and bringing about into their lives, the harmony. He continues that if they're shared life it should be marked, by the same love and bringing their lives into harmony. And fixing their minds on the same object, which is Jesus.

And to put a bow on it, he adds that they should never act out of selfish ambition or a vanity, but instead regard everyone else as more important than themselves, and to look after the interest of others above their own. And it's explicitly behind the Christ narrative that Ezzo preached about last week, where he emphasizes that they should have the same mind that Jesus did as he

humbled himself and became obedient to God, even to the point of death on the cross. And that's how we arrive at our text for today. Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but so much more now in my absence, work on out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is at work in you. Enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So do all things without murmuring or arguing so that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish, and the midst of a crooked and a perverse generation in which you shine like stars in the world. Holding forth the word of life so that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. So when I read this, I hear this. Paul is clearly trying to say, now that their task is to practice their salvation. To live it in a way that is active and reflected in their community, and to not let disputes among them, keep them from what they were called to do. So to practice their salvation and live it in a way that is active and reflected in their community.

And there's a couple things I think we need to engage to help frame what he's talking about here. First, we need to remember that this letter wasn't just written to a person, but it was written to a people. To the community of Christ following people in Philippi and the distinction in audience. I know it may sound smaller, kind of nerdy, but it actually is really important because it's easy for us to read this letter and hear a you and think it's simply about you, but as Paul's writing it, he's saying it's about you. And a better translation of this for us today, maybe all y'all. And to be clear when Paul says all y'all, he means all of the Christian believers in Philippi, and I have two defenses for those of you who are annoyed with me using the word term, all y'all. One, Scott Dudley does it and he has a PhD, two.

I would urge you to say what the larger point and not let grammar steal your calling. So let's move on. With that in mind, if we looked at this part of the text, again, without perspective, it would read like this. Do all things without murmuring or grumbling so that all y'all Christians in Philippi may be blameless and innocent children of God, without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which all y'all Christians and Philippi shine like stars in the world, holding forth to the word of life. The message here is this is a moment where we see a leader trying to help disciple his community by discussing with them how a saved people live out their salvation in community. And to be clear, Paul understands that people are still reach one by one, each one, teach one, save one, right? But they're not saved just for themselves.

And he's not trying to erase the individual, but he also knew that they were saved to become a people for God, with a preference for others over themselves. So as followers of Jesus, we need to hold on that the role of the individual is never meant to be separated from their connection and responsibility to community, especially the Christian community that they're a part of.

Second, as people for God in Philippi, Paul is also pushing them to work out their faith. Not just for themselves, but so that they can shine like stars in the darkness. And as I say that, I have to share with you something that I heard recently. A few months back, I was at a gathering of pastoral leaders for New Hope and rock Chinese church and Belprez, and in the midst of our time together, blaze, who is one of the leaders for New Hope.

He said something that was really profound to me. We were talking about what it means to disciple others and Blaze made this comment that in his culture, he was taught that my faith is not a gift for me. It's a gift that to give to others. And as he said that, I sat back because as a white American, I was confronted with how small and individualized the American church has engaged in faith. And I was also really convicted because it brought to mind the reality that if I knew the cure for cancer, I wouldn't stop talking about it. I would go door to door to tell people, I've seen it ravage people's lives. But when it comes to faith, honestly, I hesitate sometimes. And I'm a pastor.

I mean it, with all of my training and calling and everything else, you would say that I have, I get tripped up at times about how to talk about Jesus either without offending someone or by trying to not be like all the bad models of talking about Jesus that I've seen. Because let's be honest, the guy at the Mariners game is not really helping any one of us out. But something that's consistent throughout Paul's writings is the truth that faith is not only something we receive, it's something we do. And along with that another thing that is consistent across Paul's writings is that faith is ultimately expressed as obedience to Christ. Now I'm not saying rule following obedience, I'm saying coming under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and being devoted to him completely. And the model that Paul almost always points to describe this is what he looks like when Jesus dies on the cross. He empty's himself out for the sake of others, without regard for what it would cost him.

And this brings us Paul finally, to the urgent point that he was trying to make, for what all of this was aiming at in the first place. Work out your own faith. This is a faith that is from God, but is not only something that we receive. It's something that we steward and give away. The last thing we need to engage before we move on to how this applies to us today is that when Paul talks about salvation or faith, he's understanding it is both something that is real and present in the here and now, but also something that is not fully complete until the future. And what I mean by that is because of what Jesus did on the cross, the future of God has already begun. But that will not be finished until Jesus comes again. And that time bringing heaven with him.

But the fact is also true that the very work of doing the gospel now and partnering with God to make here and now actually makes that future reality more real in the present. And in spite of that future, not being fully reached in the here and now, it still impacts how we as believers live in the here and now. And Paul goes further to say very clearly as he calls us to cling to Jesus, to shine like lights in the world, that we are called to not be affected or impacted by the present challenges of this world.

So to the believers in Philippi, Paul is saying, yeah, you are Jesus followers surrounded by a Pagan culture. And you live in a world where it's really challenging to follow Jesus. And that is very difficult sometimes, but he is also saying those challenges are not what define them. And the future that God has begun, has already begun. And what is clear is that should shape how they live now. So let's put all of this together. Paul wants all y'all Christians in Philippi to understand that faith is not just something we receive. It's a gift that they have been called to give to others. And that by engaging in that task, they join Jesus and in bringing God's more intended future into reality today. And he wants them to not let themselves be defined by their internal squabbles or challenges, and instead to focus on him. But the question is that we need to return to as we hear that is why? What was so important that they needed to let go of all the conflicts and everything among them?

Because if I'm being honest, if I was a Christ following person in Philippi, I could see myself reading this letter and being like, really? Because Paul doesn't know what I'm passionate about, and if you know me, I'm passionate about the things that I'm passionate about. I didn't just decide when they all care about this. I care about it. And if Paul's going to write me a letter from somewhere else, he's my friend. Sure. But why, what? But the reason that Paul gives here is that the conflicts among themselves will keep them from being the lights and the darkness that they're called to be. It's quite simply that simple. They have a higher calling to share the gospel and they're in a Pagan world that is missing out on that. And for Paul, that is something that cannot go unaddressed. It is a massive problem for him. In one sense, it's pretty simple. And in another sense, it's really hard. Anyone else feel like that's not just a word for the believers in Philippi? Anyone else feel like that might be a word for us today?

Now, what I am not going to do right now is cherry pick one of our present challenges, struggles, things. And we work through it and tie a bow on it and make it perfect for everyone or annoy that people who don't agree with what I just did. Because there's too many things to pick from. I don't have the time to do it well. And I don't think this would be the way to do it. So what I'm going to say is this, the kind of people that Paul is talking about the church becoming, is not beyond us. It's just going to take all of us being willing to let go of the stuff that's getting in the way and joining together with a common cause of spreading the faith that we have because it's more important than anything else.

Because as someone very thoughtfully said to me the other day, the reason we cannot let go of our calling to shine like stars is that this sky is way, way too dark these days. And the reality is that we're more focused on our own stuff. That's a problem. And sadly, this is in a lot of ways what the shadow witness of the church is. That we care more about ourselves and our own stuff and what happens here, than we do about the unbelieving people out there. And I'm not saying that to make a dramatic point, this is a common refrain I hear from students that want nothing to do with what we believe in.

We have to step into the call to prefer others over ourselves, with a special emphasis for the people who are beyond our faith community, who aren't here and make sharing our faith with them, the highest priority. And here's the thing, I don't really think you or I need a five point plan to figure out how to do this. I think it's just something we need to choose to do, to stick with it, even when it's hard. And if you need help, it's okay. Because as Paul talks about God has given us a people to be a part of and people have people. And we can be people to each other in the midst of this challenge because we can help each other figure this out. And we have to figure it out because the gift of faith that we have to give and to share is way, way more important than the cure for cancer. And we should live lives of faith together that reflect that.

And also regarding the desire for a five point plan, I'm not sure I can find a really solid biblical foundation for that being a way we should live or the thing we should wait for before we move. Abraham was given a promise that wasn't defined. And his job was to believe and obey. Moses was told to take the people of God into the promised land and it took 40 years. I could go on and on and on. There is a theme within scripture of being called to an action of trusting God and being obedient to that action and being open to the next step that God has yet to reveal. So instead of being focused on not knowing what step four or five to this plan is, focus on why taking this step is so important and trust God with the rest.

See, the thing that I thought about as I was reading about the bickering Bills is at the end of the day, and if we think about the big picture, it really doesn't matter if they solve their problems. If they win more football games, that's great, but that's not the most important thing in the world. Mariners fans take note. Because while football is fun, it's not the most important thing in the world. But what we believe is. So I'm going to leave you with these two questions. I ask you to contemplate them, pray about them, talk to someone else about them. For you, what do you let get in the way of what really matters? And are those things and the squabbles that we get into as a community really worth, not more meaningfully inviting people into the most important thing in the world?

Which is knowing and following Jesus, pray with me. God, thank you so much that you are God. That you take us as we are and call us into more. And this is another opportunity for that. We are who we are and we got where we are for whatever reason, but you look at us and you call us into more and you say that we are made for glory. So help us to step into that glory by trusting you more that we want to trust into or hold onto the things that lead to conflict and division. And God made the witness that comes from this church as a result of working together for your purposes, shock, shock the unbelieving world in our community. And I'm thinking about that high school sophomore that can't believe that we're actually about the things that we say we're about. May he knows something different because of who we are. Say your name we pray. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- How did you receive your faith? What was that experience like and who was part of it?
- Why did you choose to believe? What was compelling about the Gospel?
- What are things that tempt you to grumble or complain?
- How can you shine in the darkness? Ask God in prayer to help you discern this.
- Who are people you can disciple you as you engage this work?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.