

ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK AND BRAY - 4TH OCTOBER 2020

NOT FINISHED YET (PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13)

Welcome and Announcements

"This week the Government placed the whole country on Level 3 of their 'Living with Covid' plan, which means neither Blackrock nor Bray will be able to meet in person for another few weeks. These periods of lockdown can be difficult and I hope these transcripts are of some encouragement. Also if you ever want a chat feel free to get in touch."

- Rev. Andrew Gill

Call to Worship

Psalm 19:1-6

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

*Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.*

*They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.*

*Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.*

*In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.*

*It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.*

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

Your word is perfect and revives the soul.

Your decrees are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

Your commandments are right and clear,
bringing joy to the heart, and giving insight for living.

Your promises are pure, lasting forever.

Your laws are true; each one is fair.

They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold.

They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb.

They are a warning to your servants,
a great reward for us who obey them.

Merciful God,

How can we know all the sins lurking in our heart?

Cleanse us from these hidden faults.

Keep your servants from deliberate sins!

Don't let them control us.

Free us of our guilt
and make us innocent of great sin.

Loving Father,

May the words of our mouth
and the meditation of our heart
be pleasing to you, O Lord,
our rock and our redeemer.

Amen

Reading - Philippians 2:12-13 (NRSV)

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work 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.

Sermon - 'Not Finished Yet' (Philippians 2:12-13)

During the week Julie and I decided to organise our kitchen cupboards and it turned out to be a bigger job than we were expecting. In a kitchen there's always so much to clear up and to clean out. We had wedding presents that our friends and family had so generously given us which needed to be sorted out, organised, and put in their proper place. And I was very reluctant to throw out all my old coffee cups! After a few hours we both looked at each other and said, *'that will do'*. We weren't totally finished, there was still more to clean or tidy, but we felt it was at a good enough level to stop working.

I think sometimes when it comes to our spiritual lives we can also say, *'it will do'*. We look at our love, obedience, and service and we know it's not perfect or where it should be. From the outside it looks good enough and so we don't put in any more effort. Over the last few weeks we have been looking at the New Testament letter to the Philippians. Today we're looking at two verses that will remind us that when God looks at our spiritual life, he says, *'I'm not finished yet!'*

In verse 12 Paul writes, *"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."* The phrase *'work out your salvation'* is unusual. Salvation is about the forgiveness of sins, it means to be rescued out of death and into eternal life. But what does it mean to *'work out your salvation'*?

Firstly, I think it is helpful, to look at what it doesn't mean. Paul does not say to work *for* your salvation. Paul is not telling the Philippians that they need to earn their salvation, or that through their good works they can achieve salvation for themselves. No, the Philippians have already been saved when they heard Paul preach the gospel, and when they put their faith in Christ's death and resurrection. (cf. Philippians 3:9)

Paul is not telling them to work *for* their salvation, nor is he saying to work *up* their salvation. He does not mean that Jesus has got them started with salvation and now they need to work themselves up for the rest. When we are saved, we are fully saved, so there is no need 'top up' the salvation that God has already given us.

Neither is he telling them to work *at* the salvation. It's not that Jesus has given them salvation but they need to be really careful or they might lose it. No, the Bible assures us of our salvation and the Holy Spirit confirms it in our lives. (cf. Philippians 1:6)

So if he's not telling them to work *for*, *up*, or *at* their salvation what does it mean to work *out* your salvation? Essentially it means to live more like Jesus. Paul is saying let the salvation that you have produce obedience in your life.

If you were at the gym and your personal trainer told you to work out your muscles, you wouldn't think it meant you had to go and find muscles. You already have muscles, but maybe they're a little bit weak and need strengthening so you can become fitter and healthier. In the same way when Paul says to work out your salvation, he means to put your salvation to work in your life so that it produces humility and obedience in your life.

What Paul is talking about here is what we call 'sanctification' which is the process of progressing in our faith. Imagine it like a restaurant with an all you can eat buffet. Do you just put a small amount of one thing on your plate, or do fill it with as much as possible? Sanctification is like filling up our plate with what will make us more anymore like Jesus. God in his goodness and grace lays before us this vast array of qualities and characteristics that we can have. We can go to God and we can have love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, self-control, goodness, and faithfulness. We can keep going to God and receive these things in increasing abundance. These verses invite us to join in the partnership with God and his sanctifying work in us.

Look again at verse 13, *"for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose."* God is at work in you, through the Holy Spirit he is actively changing your heart. The God who created our universe by the power of his word, and the God who brought Jesus out of the grave, is at work in you, redeeming and recreating you into the image of his Son! We work out our salvation because God is at work in us. We are in constant need of his grace and his power in order for that transformation to happen. Working out our salvation is the practice of humble dependence on God and prayerfully seeking his work in our lives.

This means that we can be expecting God to be at work in us. Sometime we get to a point in our lives and we think nothing's going to change for us anymore. We feel we are too old, or too set in our ways, or that we've made too many mistakes in the past. But we should never underestimate what God can do in a life. No matter who you are, no matter what you've done, no matter how much work there is to do in your life, God looks at you and he says, 'I'm not finished yet'.

But this doesn't all happen in an instant, the truth is it is a life long process. The Westminster Confession of Faith describes it like this, *[there remains] a continual and irreconcilable war in every part between the flesh and the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail; yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part does overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* (Chapter XIII - On Sanctification) What this ancient confession is saying is that there is a war going on in us between the sinful nature and the spirit of God, and there are times it may look like our old self is prevailing, but in the end God will win and he will finish the work that he has started in our lives.

Just like my kitchen cupboards, the sanctifying work in your life is bigger than you realise. God has got a lot that he needs to clear out and clean up. He is patiently helping us to give up all those parts of our life that we're holding on to. He is healing our hearts, and showing us that his ways are better. Even as you read through this today, God is at work in you, and he wants you to know that he is not finished with you yet! So continue to work out your salvation for it is God who works in you.

Prayer

Father God,

We thank you for the salvation you have given us
through our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Holy Spirit, help us to work out our salvation,
and increase our obedience, love, and service.

Continue your sanctifying work in our lives,
until it is completed on the Day of Christ,
to the glory and praise of God. Amen.