

Joining Jesus' Story
Week 6: Work it out

We are in the middle of a series called Joining Jesus' Story, which takes us through Philipians. This is a **letter** written to these new believers in Philippi that Paul wrote in **prison** while waiting for his trial. He was accused of teaching about Jesus, which is **contrary to Roman culture**. Particularly in Philippi, which was inhabited by a lot of **retired Romans soldiers** who were very patriotic and saw the emperor as a god.

If you missed last week I encourage you to get on the website and listen. We covered **the heart of this whole letter**, the story of Jesus, which is the story we are invited to join. We have been challenging one another to memorize it. **Here's a little visual** we used last week to help you picture and remember **2:6-11**.

Verse 5 says that you should have the **same mind or attitude** as Jesus. Then Paul uses a poem to describe what that means.

He is **God**
Did not use this for his own **advantage**
Gave up his divine **privilege**
Took the role of a **servant**
Was **born** as a human being
Humbled himself
Obedient to the point of **death**
Even death on a **cross**

And everyone will confess that Jesus is **Lord**
He commands all creation to **bow** to Jesus
He gave him the name above every **name**
God lifted him to a place of **honor**

I found out about another really helpful tool for memorizing and internalizing scripture. It's called "**Remember Me**". It's an app with little games to help you memorize scripture.

Now Paul's purpose is to apply the story of Jesus' humble, emptying of himself to the Philippians situation. How can they have the same attitude as Jesus did? And of course what about us in our situation in 2021.

Here's what Paul says next. ¹² 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**, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.
Philippians 2:12-18

This takes us back to when Paul said...**Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. 1:27a (NLT)** He wants them to live like citizens of The Kingdom of God and not try to fit in as good citizens of Philippi. Living in a way that is worthy or consistent with the Good News or Gospel of Jesus. That is joining Jesus' story acknowledging Jesus as your king living in a way that is consistent with His Gospel.

The question for us is...**What does "work out your own salvation" mean for me?**

But what does it mean? It's a **strange statement**. Here's why if you were raised in church this statement might initially **repel you**. It sounds like Paul is saying that we can save ourselves. It sounds like Paul is saying that we **aren't saved by grace** that instead we are saving ourselves.

For now let's accept that it isn't Paul challenging the idea of us not being saved by God's grace. He isn't contradicting himself. Let's for now view it as a statement that Paul uses to **challenge them to respond to God's grace** and what Jesus has done. It's a way of saying that it will take some **effort on our part to join this story, to live like Jesus**. It isn't just

about saying a prayer. It's about living like this is the story of Jesus, starring Jesus and I'm a part of it, not this is the story of Bill, starring Bill and Jesus is in it.

That being said, working out your own salvation for Paul is once again a challenge to...**Practice obeying God's Word**

"...as you have always obeyed," v. 12

Paul is telling them to **keep obeying God's word, keep obeying the gospel that he taught** them even though they will get **resistance** from the Roman culture.

In his letter to a much more troubled and **dysfunctional** church in Galatia. **I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse! This is called a double curse.¹⁰ Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? **If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.** Galatians 1:6-10 NIV**

Keep in mind the double curse is **for those who are teaching a gospel other than** the one that Paul taught.

Remember we are talking about **practicing obedience.** **It's not natural for any of us.**

Here's how it works in my mind. **It starts with a godly desire** then I find a way to **practice that desire.** **Then enough practice leads to a habit of doing the right thing.** This habit produces **characters like Jesus.** Little steps of obedience later become big things. **They develop confidence in the goodness and faithfulness of God.**

What can I do today that will help me to be able to do something in the future that I am not capable of now.

We are blown away by dramatic acts of obedience like someone quitting a job to do something with little pay and no long-term security. But what you don't know is the million small-unseen ways that this person has said "yes" to Jesus' voice and his story earlier.

It's not about achieving perfect obedience. When we mess up, sin, fall shorts it's best to just smile and say, "Why am I acting like that dead version of myself instead of trusting Jesus."

The word "practice" implies that the person who needs practice doesn't have it all figured out.

In verse 16 Paul says uses the phrase, "...holding fast to the word of life" v. 16 God's word is what produces life. What would it look like for you to hang onto it as if it were a life preserver and you are adrift in the ocean. Lord, help us to hang onto what we hear today as if your future depends upon it because it does.

What does it mean for you and me to work out our own salvation. It means to start practicing obedience. It's also clear to Paul that... **This isn't about what I have earned**

This is where we get back to our original understanding that **Paul isn't contradicting his belief that we are saved by grace** not our own doing. This is where we start believing a **false gospel** not what Jesus established and Paul taught. **If our idea of grace is that there is no effort on our side then we have a gospel that makes discipleship an option.** It makes scripture an option. All I have to do is rely on the grace of God to **fix my sin problem and punch my ticket to heaven.** I can't add anything like, following, being changed by or committed to Jesus missions because then it is a work of salvation that I've earned and not grace.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling is a gospel that asks for faithful responses and obedience to follow. Paul says that we

should, "have the attitude of Jesus." Do you think that comes without effort? Do you think it takes effort to preach and teach when they throw you in prison? Jesus himself said that "anyone who wants to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."

Grace isn't anti effort, it's anti earning. My effort is my response. It's my obedience to choose to join Jesus' story.

And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. Romans 5:9 NLT This is where we get to the difference between justification salvation.

Justification is what Jesus' sacrifice on the cross did. Now when God looks at Bill Greiner he sees that I am trusting in what Jesus did for me. Now God views me "just as if I'd never sinned." I am made right in God's eyes and I can now have a relationship with a holy God.

Salvation happens in the future. That is the summation of what Jesus did and my response to what he did, my repentance, trust and my willingness to learn to follow.

"They should work out their salvation with a seriousness appropriate to those who look forward to salvation on the final day, but they should remember at all times that the whole process leading to their acquittal on that Day is theirs neither to initiate nor to complete. It is God's from first to last." 138

God began it and he will finish it. The in between has effort but here's the kicker he through his Holy Spirit he even enables me to do that.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding that Paul is talking about us meeting God halfway he brings verse 13. God gives us "both to will and to work for his good pleasure." We do not initiate anything. He draws me toward what he wants for me. He gives me the desire for the right things. Desire—practice—habit—character!

But we must respond to all that he has done and will do for us. That is where effort comes into play. I am different now. It is all because of what God did for me by His loving-favor. His loving-favor was not wasted.

Wow just let that sink in. **I worked harder than all the other missionaries. But it was not I who worked. It was God's loving-favor working through me.** 1 Corinthians 15:10 NLT

It's about allowing, not resisting Jesus living his life through us. That's joining Jesus' story.

So Paul is telling us to **practice obeying, don't try to earn anything just respond** to what he has done for you and...**Learn from the past**

Let's look at verse 14 again. ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing...**Can you think of another group** that did this in the Bible?

Verse 14 is a **challenge to learn from the history of God's people Israel.** They are the new community of Israel. The word "complaining" is used in the Greek translation of the OT when people complained to Moses.

And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ³ and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." Remember the good old days of slavery?

⁸ And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD." Exodus 16:2-3 & 8

Grumbling is when you haven't gotten what you think you deserve or have earned. Do you see the problem? This grumbling and complaining has two main issues. **1. It is self-focused.** I'm not championing the needs or interest of another. This is about me, and what God, my spouse, the church...should be doing for me. **2. It isn't really against leaders or other people it is against God.** It is saying, "God, you didn't provide me with _____ or protect me from _____ and that's what I expect because that's what I deserve.

Do you know what we deserve? Banishment, hell because of all of the rotten things we have said, done and thought.

Remember this verse from earlier. **Do not look only on your own interest but look to the interest of others.**

Paul is saying, **"Remember that you are God's people and learn from the mistakes of past generations as they wandered in the desert."**

Did you know that they wandered around until a whole generation of disobedient people had died off? Then God brought others into the land of promise and made them the nation that would greet the savior Jesus.

What is at stake when we grumble? Not just wandering and missing the promises of God. **It's the opportunity to be what Israel was intended to be and what the church is intended to be, a light to the nations.** We are to be a light in the darkness for people who are lost. **A light draws people it doesn't repel.** Tear gas and fire hoses, barbed wire, guard dogs repel people.

Our grumbling and bad attitudes at school, work, the grocery store and at home around the dinner table will repel people not draw them. Our grumbling is like tear gas!

In the Old Testament Israel was to be a light shining to all nations about to know God and please him. Therefore they were God's people made unique for this purpose. From out of this nation would come the ultimate light to all nations Jesus, the Messiah. Now God's chosen people are anyone regardless of ethnicity, skin color, language, culture that make Jesus their king and follow him.

Are we **getting a clearer picture** about what it means to work out your own salvation? But there's one more and it's one we've seen before. **And it has to do with what Paul wants instead of the grumbling and complaining.** Working out your own salvation means we must...**Maintain the unity Jesus built**

Let me say this first and it might sound like a **broken record** but Jesus created unity between us through what he did on the cross and **through his spirit that binds us together**. It's just about maintaining and **not tearing it down**.

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**, This is a not intended to be an individual thing. Me going off by myself and getting me head together, working it out in my mind. No, working out is seen as a community event. **I work it out in the context of our fellowship**. This is a letter to a church not an individual.

Paul would go so far as to say that we cannot work out our own salvation **without the church**. It's within the complicated messiness of our relationships that the working out happens. **It's not just me, my bible and some peace and quiet**. **I need you or I can't work it out**. Working it out only happens in **real life** not in theory.

Here's how unity gets damaged. **Do all things without grumbling or disputing,¹⁵ 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,**

We became a pariah in our culture instead of a light in a crooked and twisted generation. **We don't shine when we are tearing at one another and only looking to our own interests**.

Remember they were in a culture that was already **predisposed to not trust them**. If those Romans see that they are grumbling and complaining that will just prove their point.

When we are grumbling and complaining we are trying to get when we deserve or what we have coming to us. This takes us back to when Paul said, **"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."** Philippians 2:4

What is at stake in this call to unity is their ability to be the new Israel that will be **"a light to the gentiles,"** a witness in a **"crooked and**

depraved generation.” 142 “Their internal disunity, in other words, will tarnish their external proclamation of the gospel. Holding to the word of life is more than simply standing firm against persecuting opponents. It is also demonstrating the validity of the gospel to people outside the faith by the way we live.”

Again this is so important that Jesus prayed about it near to his crucifixion. “I do not pray for these followers only. I pray for those who will put their trust in Me through the teaching they have heard. ²¹ May they all be as one, Father, as You are in Me and I am in You. May they belong to Us. Then the world will believe that You sent Me. ²² I gave them the honor You gave Me that they may be one as We are One. ²³ I am in them and You are in Me so they may be one and be made perfect. Then the world may know that You sent Me and that You love them as You love Me. John 17:20-23

Unity is not happening in the church at large in America. We are divided and creating enemies over **stuff like masks.** Or how we handle **certain hot bottom topics.** Or **who we vote for.**

We have to work toward it now that we are 1 church 2 locations. In a way right now we are 1 church 3 locations. We have people who are in Beaverton, Midland and on line because they aren't comfortable in a public setting yet. **It's not going to automatically happen.** And it won't happen if **we are selfish, looking toward our own interests and not the interests of others.** It's not ideal for many of us to watch a screen for the sermon **once a month.** It's a sacrifice but that's what it takes to be one.

The remedy to this disunity is the story of Jesus. We take the role of a servant to others instead of just trying to get mine. **We can justify our own attitudes and behaviors that lead to disunity and ineffectiveness, which will cause us to judge others.** Or we can join Jesus' story by **taking on his attitude.** One of my hero's Dietrich Bonheoffer said it this way.

“Self-justification and judging belong together...as justification by grace and serving belong together.” Dietrich Bonheoffer **He served the Nazi guards who would later hang him on Easter morning.**

Steps to Joining Jesus' Story

1. Confess my grumbling and complaining

I confess that I have grumbled recently. I was grumbling about how I didn't like how some in the Christian community perceives the way Eagle Ridge Church of God and Bill Greiner operate. It's really about **Bill Greiner**.

2. How can I turn that around and focus on others?

Whatever you are thinking about in question #1 take that situation and turn it on its ear and serve someone.

- Pick up your family's Connection Bag and one to deliver. They are at both locations.

3. What can I learn from our history of disunity?

I want you to think about our history in **Midland**. When has disunity and grumbling caused us to wander in the desert and even have a bad name in the community where we are to be a light? How about those of you who have been a part of Beaverton before joining with Eagle Ridge Church of God? I'm not saying to dwell on it but we have to look at our past and see with a historical view how much time we lost.