

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Sacrificial Joy Philippians 2:17-18

I am sure that we are all familiar with Palestinian suicide bombers. No matter how we view these particular individuals one thing appears to be very clear, they joyfully kill themselves for the Palestinian cause. Or at least it appears that they joyfully kill themselves for the Palestinian cause. When they do this what is frequently the response of their family members? The response that is often times displayed at least for western journalists and news people in general is one of joy.

The suicide bomber represents himself as joyful at the prospect of giving his life up for the Palestinian cause and his family members represent themselves as joyful when he or she actually carries through with the bombing.....When you have witnessed this representation how have you responded? All of this may seem very strange to you, but it certainly would not seem strange for Paul. In fact he would encourage us to think in a very similar way. Not in respect to the Palestinian cause certainly that would hold very little interest for him but rather in respect to the cause of Christ.

Paul in his final appeal to the Philippians to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ in Philippians 2:12-18 introduces three concerns..... What was Paul's first concern that we considered several weeks ago? Paul's first concern was that they work out their salvation (Philippians 2:12-13). Let us read **Philippians 2:12-13, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; (13) for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."** The command to work out their salvation does not mean that they were to work for their salvation. Rather it means that they were to exert the necessary effort to live out a life of obedience consistent with the gift of salvation that they had already received by grace through faith.

Having introduced his first concern Paul then becomes much more specific by explaining how he wants them to do this. This leads to a second command and therefore to the second concern. Paul's second concern was that they do all things without grumbling and disputing (Philippians 2:14-16). What were Paul's two stated reasons for this command?

The first reason for the church to do all things without grumbling and disputing is that it might function as a beacon of light to a faithless world (Philippians 2:15-16). Let us read **Philippians 2:15** and the first part of **verse 16, "that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life"** The more successful we are in this area of doing all things without grumbling and disputing the more successful we will be in validating the saving power of the gospel. The more successful we are in this area of doing all things without grumbling and disputing the brighter our light will shine in an unsaved world.

What was Paul's second stated reason? The second reason for the church to do all things without grumbling and disputing is that those who have spiritually labored in our lives might have cause to glory in the day of Christ (Philippians 2:16).

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Let us read **Philippians 2:14-16** “**Do all things without grumbling and disputing; (15) that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as light in the world, (16) holding fast the world of life, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.**” Hopefully there are people we know who are sacrificially investing themselves in our lives on a spiritual level. Who are helping us to work out our salvation? Who are helping us in our pursuit of holiness to do all things without grumbling and disputing? Who wants the very best for us spiritually and who hopefully will have the opportunity on the day of Christ to rejoice in the fact that we are present and accounted for?

But our presence on the day of Christ should not be assumed. But though it should not be assumed it can be confirmed if we in fact sincerely seek to work out our salvation and if we work it out in such tangible ways such as striving for Christ’s sake to do all things without grumbling and disputing. And if we confirm the genuineness of our faith by the way we live those who have spiritually labored in our lives will have cause to glory on the day of Christ..... When my wife looks around for me on the day of Christ I would like her to find me, when my children look around for me on the day of Christ I would like them to find me, when you look around for me on the day of Christ I would like you to find me..... I had better pay heed.

Paul in his final appeal to the Philippian church to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ raises three concerns. We have looked at two of those concerns. This weekend we will look at the final concern. I would hope and pray that this final concern would be helpful in allowing us to see the bigger picture of joy. I would hope that in seeing the bigger picture of joy we will find ourselves rejoicing not only in respect to the difficult circumstances of our lives as we seek to serve Christ but we will find ourselves rejoicing in the difficult circumstances of others as they seek to serve us in Christ. What is Paul’s final concern?

Paul’s third concern is that the church would rejoice when their sacrificial service to others in name of Christ is made complete by the sacrificial actions of those they have served (Philippians 2:17-18). The Church at Philippi had been served by Paul and Paul had been served by the church at Philippi in their common struggle to advance the gospel of Christ in an unsaved world. Paul’s sacrificial service to the Philippians in the midst of this common struggle was characterized by joy. And the Philippians sacrificial service to Paul in the midst of this common struggle was characterized by joy. And this is a wonderful thing. But there may be times when we are more willing to rejoice when we are the ones making the personal sacrifices to advance the gospel than we are to rejoice when we see others who we have spiritually cared for making the same, similar or even greater sacrifices. And this was the case with the Philippians in relationship to Paul. The Philippian church was struggling to rejoice in Paul’s sufferings. The Philippian church was struggling to rejoice in Paul’s imprisonment and possible execution for the cause of Christ . Paul wants to minister to this struggle. He wants them to see his sacrifices for the cause of Christ in a way that would allow them to personally rejoice with him in that sacrifice.

Let us read **Philippians 2:17-18** “**But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. (18) And you too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.**”

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Let us look more carefully at the passage. Notice the first word, “but.” **Verse 17** is linked with **verse 16**. How is it linked? Paul has just given the reasons for the Philippians to do all things without grumbling and disputing. The second reason that he gives was that those who have spiritually labored in our lives might have cause to glory in the day of Christ knowing that they had not run or toiled in vain. More specifically that he would have cause to glory knowing that he had not run or toiled in vain (Philippians 2:16).

When Paul uses the words “run or toiled” to describe the effort he put out in sacrificially ministering to the spiritual needs of the Philippian church I am sure that certain very vivid images may have come to their minds. They could have thought of Paul’s efforts to win his first convert in Philippi. They could have thought about the effort the Paul made in seeking to expand the church beyond that initial convert as he established a base of operations in the house of Lydia. They could have thought about the effort that he made to do this in spite of the dangers he was facing in bringing radical changes through the gospel to people in the community of Philippi such as in the life of the demon possessed slave girl. They could have thought about the effort that he made in bring the gospel to the Philippian jailer even after he had been beaten and his own future well being was still very much in question. All of these images might have come flooding into their minds. And with those images they may have been tempted to feel sorry for Paul. But Paul does not want them to feel sorry for him in respect to the effort he has expended or in respect to all that he has suffered so he goes on to give them an additional thought introduced with the word “but.”

What is this additional thought? **“But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice.....”** He in effect is saying, “Don’t feel sorry for me when you think of the effort that I have put out.” “Don’t feel sorry for me when you think of all that I have suffered.” Even if I am executed in the cause of Christ I want you to know that I will rejoice.” Paul wants the Philippians to know that even if his running and toiling results in his death he will continue to rejoice (Philippians 2:17).

Does this thought sound familiar? It should. Let us go back and read **Philippians 1:12-18** **“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel (13) so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, (14) and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. (14) Some to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; (16) the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; (17) the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. (18) What then Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice.”** If Paul’s running results in Christ being exalted and proclaimed he will rejoice. If Paul’s toiling results in Christ being exalted and proclaimed he will rejoice. And If Paul’s dying results in Christ being exalted and proclaimed he will rejoice. In Philippians 2:17 he is prepared to rejoice in being the “drink offering.” Since Paul had already introduced the possibility of his death in Philippians 1:20 most commentators believe that the drink offering refers to his present imprisonment and possible execution.

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What is the significance of Paul referring to himself as a drink offering? In the Old Testament the drink offerings were poured over or beside the burnt offering. It completed the primary sacrifice (Numbers 15:3-10). Paul saw his present imprisonment and possible death as completing a more important or primary sacrifice. A sacrifice that in his mind took priority over his own.

What is the more important sacrifice that Paul sees his present imprisonment and possible execution completing? The primary sacrifice was the sacrifice being offered by the Philippians on behalf of Paul during his Roman imprisonment (Philippians 4:10-20). Let us continue to read the passage.

“But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith.” The Philippians had been very active in their participation with Paul in the gospel from the very beginning of their Christian walk. And there was no greater expression of their participation with Paul in the gospel than now in his imprisonment. Epaphroditus, a Philippian, had expended himself, risking his life and nearly dying for the sake of Christ's work, in order to serve Paul. He did this not only on his own account, but also as representative of the Philippian church.

Paul saw himself as an extension of the Philippians work on behalf of the Gospel of Christ. He therefore viewed his sufferings and possible death as completing their primary sacrifice. Doesn't Paul's perspective reflect well on his character? He is a humble man. He does not seek to elevate himself in the eyes of men. He prefers to live out what he teaches. Remember Philippians 2:3 **“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself;.....”** Certainly the apostle Paul in effect was living that principle out here in this passage. He sees the Philippians as priests offering up their lives as a sacrifice and his life was just a topping. His sacrifice was simply the drink offering. Paul places the emphasis in this verse on the sacrifice and service of the Philippians faith, not on his drink offering, however gladly he is prepared to offer it.

Sometimes it is easy to see what we are doing for others, but we sometimes do not take the time to consider what others have done for us..... Recently I went to a couple to ask them for their help in caring for this fellowship in a very special way. I knew that my request would involve certain sacrifices on their part. They positively responded. Why did they make the choice they made? Certainly to serve this body. But I know that a part of that choice was to serve me and to encouragement in my ministry. The sacrifice they are making is the primary sacrifice and the service that I might perform with their help and assistance is simply the drink offering. I must not lose track of that.....

Certainly Paul was not guilty of this. In fact as he considers what others have done for him he wants to acknowledge them but not only to acknowledge them but to exalt them and their work in the cause of Christ.

The joy that he is experiencing and believes that he will continue to experience as he is being poured out as a drink offering is a joy he believes the Philippians should be very familiar with. Look at the verse again, **“..... But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith I rejoice and share my joy with you all.”** This is how it reads in the NAS but the NIV is a more clear translation. How does the NIV translate this verse?

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“I am glad and rejoice with you all.” The NIV translation “rejoice with you all” in verse 17 suggests that ‘the sacrificial service’ of the Philippians was joyfully embraced not only by them but by Paul.....

Certainly the separate ingredients of that sacrificial service, namely their financial help to the apostle, the sending of Epaphroditus to minister to him on their behalf, together with their prayers, gave evidence of the joy they had in serving Paul and how did Paul respond to their joyful service on his behalf even while he is rejoicing in the opportunity to be the drink offering. He is happy for them. What does he say, **“I rejoice and I rejoice with you all.”**

This leads us to Paul’s third concern. What was Paul’s third concern? Paul’s third concern is that the church would rejoice when their sacrificial service to others in name of Christ is made complete by the sacrificial actions of those they have served (Philippians 2:17-18). Let us look at **Philippians 2:18 “And you too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.”**

He begins by saying, **“And you too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way.....”** They are rejoicing in the sacrifice that they have made to the Lord on behalf of Paul in his Roman imprisonment and now Paul exhorts them very strongly to further rejoicing . When Paul calls them to **“rejoice in the same way,”** it is in the form of a command. When Paul calls them to **“share your joy with me,”** it is in the form of a command. Paul is certainly trying to get their attention.

As he is glad to be a libation or a drink offering poured out to God on their behalf they need to share his specific joy. Paul was glad about their joyful sacrificial service to him. Let the Philippians rejoice with Paul as he joyfully pours himself out upon the sacrifice and service of their faith.

If we invest our lives in the life of our mother, father, wife, husband, child, good friend, neighbor, or a brother in Christ. If we sacrificially give ourselves to them so that they might be served in the work of the gospel of Christ. Then let us not be upset when they joyfully as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of our faith are willing to be poured out even unto death. In fact rather than being upset let rejoice them.

CONCLUSION

There are Palestinian mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, who are presently instilling in their children and in their peers the importance of the Palestinian cause and are making personal sacrifices so that those individuals might be actively and passionately involved in the advancement of that cause. If those people whom they have invested themselves in ultimately dies in that cause they will not see it as something that is tragic but rather as something that is glorious and they will rejoice. Why? Because their ultimate sacrifice is simply an extension of our ministry.

We are hopefully not going to be like the Palestinians whose cause is earthly. But we will be like the Philippians whose cause was heavenly. And we will sacrificially invest our lives in the people we care about and the people that God has entrusted to us so that they might become actively and passionately involved in the advancement of the kingdom through the proclamation of the gospel. And we will rejoice in our work and we will rejoice in the work of those we have invested our lives in even if they were to die in that cause why because we will see their lives as an extension of our ministry and joyful service.