

Joyful Progression

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

- [0 : 00] Well, with the Lord's help this evening, if we could turn to Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul's letter to the Philippians and chapter 2. Philippians chapter 2, we're looking at verses 12 to 18 this evening.
- Philippians 2 at verse 12. Where Paul writes, And so on.
- Now, at this time of year, with the weather now improving slightly, and the nights certainly get longer, many of you, I know, you're involved in planting.
- Many of you like to plant flowers. Many of you like to plant your own vegetables, whether it's potatoes, carrots, or cabbages, or whatever it may be. And as those who know a lot about planting and growing, you'll know that the process, it takes time.
- [2 : 05] The process from planting the seed to the product of a flower or a vegetable, you know that it takes time. Growing is a slow process. It doesn't happen overnight.
- And it's not easy. Because, as you know, the earth has to be prepared. The seeds have to be planted. The ground has to be watered. And the weeds have to be lifted. And it all takes effort.
- It's hard work. It takes time. There has to be an element of patience and even perseverance before the results are clearly seen. And we read about this earlier in Jesus' well-known parable.
- The parable of the sower. As you know, the parable of the sower, it isn't actually about the sower or the seed. The parable is all about the soil and onto what kind of soil the seed lands on.
- And in the parable of the sower, Jesus gives the illustration of the types of heart that sit under the sound of the gospel. Because there are those, as Jesus says, they have a hardened heart.
- [3 : 07] Where the seed, it penetrates no deeper than the surface. There are some who have hollow hearts. Their seed has no depth, no root, and no earth.
- No place to grow. There are some who have hungry hearts. Where the good seed, it takes root, but the heart, it's still not satisfied. It finds no security. And it keeps looking for it in the world.
- It's not satisfied with Jesus. And so the fruit it produces, it just gets choked. But then Jesus described the healthy heart. And the healthy heart, he said, is open and ready to respond to the seed.
- And because the healthy heart responds to the words of Jesus, they respond by faith and obedience. Jesus says, there is growth. And as Jesus said in the parable, the seed that fell on good soil, it holds it fast in an honest and good heart.
- And bears fruit with patience. And so growth takes time. Growth is a process where there has to be an element of patience and perseverance.
- [4 : 15] The healthy heart that responds to the gospel of Jesus Christ by faith and obedience, it will begin to grow. And you know, that's what Paul is talking about here in these verses.

Paul is giving to the Philippians and he's giving to us as we study this passage. He's giving us a lesson and a reminder of the work of sanctification.

Because as we know, sanctification is a process. And like it is with planting flowers and planting vegetables and sowing seed, the process of sanctification, it takes time.

It takes effort. It's hard work. And there has to be an element of patience and perseverance before results are clearly seen. And in this section, verses 12 to 18, Paul is teaching about the joyful progression in the Christian life.

The joyful progression of the Christian life. And Paul is actually, he's dealing with the question, what happens after we are saved and before we reach heaven?

[5 : 19] What happens in that time frame? What happens after the seed lands upon the good soil and before the harvest? What happens in that period?

And Paul says there is this joyful progression in the Christian life. Because there's growth, there's development, there's maturity. And he says there's sanctification. And you know, Paul, he has hinted at this already in his letter.

Because he encouraged the Philippians back in chapter 1. He said right at the beginning of his letter, he says, I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

And then later on, near the end of chapter 1, Paul exhorted the Philippians to humbly live their lives in a manner that is worthy of the gospel. But now as we come to this section, Paul explains how exactly they are to do that.

And so Paul, in these verses, he gives to us a lesson on the joyful progression of the Christian life. And he says that spiritual growth, it involves three things.

[6 : 27] Working, witnessing, and worshipping. Spiritual growth involves three things. Working, witnessing, and worshipping.

So the first thing. Working. Look at verse 12. Paul says, 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.

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. You know, when Paul addresses the congregation in Philippi, he does so with such compassionate and loving terms.

He calls them there in verse 12, my beloved. In chapter 1, Paul said that he held this congregation in his heart. And he yearned with them with the affection of Christ Jesus.

But now he calls them my beloved. And, you know, it really ought to show us that the pastor's heart that Paul had for the congregation in Philippi, it was, he had this deep love, this deep affection for them.

[7 : 42] But even more so that when he's broaching subjects that are sometimes difficult and sometimes challenging, Paul, he wants the Philippians to know that he doesn't write to them with coldness.

He doesn't speak to them with this hardness towards them. No, he wants to know that what he's saying to them is being said to them out of love.

And it's been said with warmth and affection for them. It's been said to them with such genuineness that they will grow and joyfully progress in their Christian life to give God the glory in all things.

And, you know, I was thinking even just looking at that verse. I hope and pray that that's the way you receive my ministry among you. That it's not presented to you in a cold or hard way that's very matter of fact or very distant to you.

Because my longing is that everything I say to you will be said with warmth. That it will be said with affection for you. And however difficult the topic that we're looking at is, whatever time frame it may be, that whatever I say that it's said to you in love and out of a genuine concern for your soul and for your growth as a Christian.

[9 : 03] Because my heart's desire, as I'm sure it is for you, is that we would be faithful witnesses. That we would obediently live out the gospel in our day and in our generation.

Because that's what Paul wanted for the Philippians. He says, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence.

And what Paul meant by always obeying, he didn't mean that the Philippians were perfect. Far from it. Because Paul knew that perfection is not of this world. But Paul also knew that faith and obedience is.

Faith and obedience is of this world. And it's interesting because the word obedience or obeyed, it comes from the root word to hear.

Because as you know, obedience is the act of responding to what you have heard. And that's what Jesus said when he concluded the parable of the sower. He said, he who has ears to hear, let him hear.

[10 : 08] Jesus was calling his audience, those who were in the hearing. He was calling us to respond to the gospel by living a life of faith and obedience.

He was calling us to respond to the word of God with a healthy heart. Because a spiritually healthy heart, says Jesus, it will seek to grow and bear fruit by obedience to God's word.

And that's what Paul commends. He commends the obedience of the Philippians. He commends their faith. And he commends their continued obedience to the word of God. And you know, what's remarkable that despite all that's gone on in Philippi, 10 years earlier, the Philippians, they first heard the word of God when Paul planted the church there.

Paul and his companions, as we saw a few weeks ago, they all arrived in Philippi. And Paul began to sow the seed. And as we know, that seed which Paul sowed, it landed upon good soil.

The Lord opened Lydia's heart. And the Lord opened the heart of the Philippian jailer. And the Lord opened the heart of many people in Philippi. They heard the word of God.

[11 : 21] And they responded in faith and obedience. Now Paul says here that despite his absence, despite that 10 year absence, the Philippians have continued to respond to the word of God in faith and obedience.

In other words, he's saying it has been your habitual desire to live by faith and to respond in obedience to God's word. And that's because obedience is always a response of lordship and love.

Obedience is always a response of lordship and love. Obedience is submission to the lordship of Jesus. Where Jesus is lord over your life.

And because Jesus is lord, we love him. We love him because he first loved us. And our obedience, it's an outworking of our love for King Jesus.

So obedience is a response of lordship and love. And Paul, he commends the Philippians for the fact that despite his absence, they've continued to respond to the word of God in faith and obedience.

[12 : 36] Just because their pastor wasn't there anymore. He says it didn't cause them to fall back into their old habits. And that's because Paul realized that he wasn't the driving force behind them.

It was their love for Jesus. Their desire to honor the lordship of Jesus. That's what was driving them. That was the driving force. That's what produced their obedience.

And that's what should always produce obedience. Not what other people say. Or what other people will think. Or what's expected of us. Our obedience should always be a response of lordship and love towards Jesus Christ.

And you know, by stressing the importance of obedience, Paul highlights that our joyful progression in the Christian life, it has a human element to it.

Meaning that we have a responsibility in our sanctification. We have a part to play. We have a work to do. And that's why Paul says, he goes on to say, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

[13 : 46] For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. And you know, what Paul is actually saying here is so wonderful.

Because what he's saying is that our sanctification, it's all about working out what God has already worked in, into our salvation.

Our sanctification is all about discovering and learning and growing in knowledge of what God has done in our lives through the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ.

Our sanctification, it's all about marvelling at the wonder and glory of Christ's humiliation and exaltation. Our sanctification, he says, is all about having the mind of Christ and following his example.

That's why Paul said back in verse 5, He said, that our sanctification is all about becoming more and more like Jesus.

[15 : 49] Because we are to work out, we are to labour at, we are to discover and learn and grow and marvel at, and even follow the example of Jesus Christ. And we're to do it, says Paul, with fear and trembling.

That doesn't mean that we're to work out our salvation with dread and dismay. It means that we're to purposefully work out our salvation with duty and dedication.

We're to be committed in our work of sanctification. We're to be actively working out our salvation, labouring at our joyful progression in our Christian life.

And we do that by seeking the Lord in prayer, by learning from the Lord in his word, by being in fellowship with the Lord's people, by pursuing holiness, by disciplining our minds and our bodies according to God's word.

My friend, our sanctification, it's not easy. But no one said it would be easy. That's why the Christian life is described in the Bible as a fight.

[16 : 57] It's described as a race. It's described as a pilgrimage, a journey. All these things, they all involve resistance. They all involve a struggle. They all involve perseverance and patience.

My friend, we are to work out. We're to labour at. We're to discover and learn and grow and marvel at and follow the example of Jesus. And Paul says that when we work at being like Jesus, that's when God is continually working in us.

That's when we're growing. That's when we're being shaped and taught and encouraged. We are working out what God has already worked in, into our lives through salvation in Jesus Christ.

We're discovering what God has done in us. But you know, Paul, he doesn't leave it there because he says, we work out what God has worked in so that God will work out of us.

It's amazing. We work out what God has worked in so that God will work out of us. And what Paul means is that every experience we go through in our Christian lives, and sometimes even before we were converted, God has worked all these things into our lives, all these threads.

[18 : 24] The Lord has worked them all in according to his will so that we would work out what he's doing and discover and learn and grow in learning about his character, his compassion, his love, his faithfulness, his mercy.

We're learning more and more about God. So he works in, we work out, but then God also works out of us and uses all our experiences, all our hardships, even our sorrows.

He uses it all for his glory. He uses it all for his glory. And you know, when I read Paul's words here in verses 12 and 13, I'm reminded of that anonymous poem.

I'm sure you've read it before. The Divine Weaver. It's a wonderful poem that just reminds us of what the Christian life is all about. My life is but a weaving between my Lord and me.

I cannot choose the colors. He weaves it steadily. Sometimes he weaves sorrow, and I in foolish pride. Forget that he sees the upper and I the underside.

[19 : 43] And not till the loom is silent or the shuttle cease to fly, shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why. The dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skillful hand as the threads of gold and silver in the pattern he has planned.

And this is what Paul is saying. It is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. For his good pleasure.

And so as Paul gives a lesson on the joyful progression of the Christian life, he says that spiritual growth, it involves working. But he also says that spiritual growth involves witnessing.

It involves witnessing. Look at verse 14. Paul says, Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 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, 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.

And so in these verses, Paul is just building upon his teaching of sanctification. And he does so actually by using another imperative. He uses another command.

[21 : 14] In verse 12, Paul used a command saying that we have to work out our salvation. Paul said that if we want to progress in our Christian life, if we want to grow and develop and mature in our Christian walk with the Lord, then we need to work out our own salvation.

And like we said about planting flowers or growing vegetables, it involves hard work. It's hard labor. We have to labor at it. There has to be patience and perseverance. And so, building upon that, putting effort into our joyful progression in the Christian life, Paul issues another imperative.

And what Paul is giving to us in verse 14 is some specific daily application so as to ensure our joyful progression in the Christian life.

And Paul says that in order to progress with joy, he says, do all things without grumbling or questioning. And what's fascinating here is that when Paul says all things, he means all things.

Paul is saying that every aspect of our Christian life is to be a joyful progression. Our Christian life, he says, is not to be overrun by grumbling or disputing.

[22 : 37] But every area of our Christian life is to be defined by our Christian joy. Our joy that we're in Christ, that we're saved by grace and we are being prepared for glory.

That's our Christian joy. That's what should enable us to be joyful in the all things. And all things, it includes every area of our lives. Our home, our work, our school, our church, our hobbies, our marriage, our parenting, our friendships, our family.

There's nothing in our lives that is not included in this phrase, all things. And you know, we might be tempted to think, well, what does Paul know about my life?

What does Paul understand about my situation? It's easy for him to say, you have to be joyful in all things. He doesn't know what I'm going through. But you know, what's it easy for him?

Looking at Paul's experience, I wouldn't find it a joyful experience, being under arrest, imprisoned in a house, chained to a Roman soldier, day and night, awaiting to hear if I'm going to be put to death or not.

[23 : 43] And so Paul, he's more than qualified to tell us that in order to joyfully progress in the Christian life, you're not to grumble, you're not to dispute about anything.

And you know, the word grumble means to murmur or to mutter or to moan. We're all good at moaning. We're all good at having mood swings and taking huffs and digging our heels in.

And it's interesting, this word that Paul uses for grumbling. It was the word that was often used to describe the Pharisees and all the grumbling they made about Jesus. But more than that, Paul says that our Christian life is not to be characterized by disputing or questioning.

The word is literally dialoguing. Meaning that we're not to speak back to God or protest our case or even argue with God about our circumstances in our situations.

And sometimes that's very difficult because when trying circumstances come our way, our natural desire is, well, we want to protest against God's will in our lives.

[24 : 56] But you know, I believe that it's not wrong to question why. Because even Jesus questioned why. Jesus cried out on the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

So even Jesus questioned why. But he didn't protest against the will of his father. He didn't say that what his father was doing was wrong.

He didn't say it was unfair. He didn't say it was unjust. And you know, that's the example we're to follow. It's not wrong to question why. But it's wrong to protest against the will of God in our lives.

And you know, thinking about it, that's why Jesus taught us to pray, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And you know, Paul's point in this is that it's not a good Christian witness to be grumbling and moaning in all things.

Because it doesn't display the joy of the Christian life. Now, when Paul speaks about grumbling and disputing, he's not talking about mourning or suffering. Of course, these things, they will bring sadness and heartache.

[26 : 11] But Paul, he's talking about our daily Christian lives. Because he says, if our Christian life is characterized by moaning about everything and grumbling about other people, he says, that's not a good witness.

That doesn't follow the example of Christ that he's just set out for us. That doesn't show that we have the humble mind of Christ. Because, even as Paul says in verse 15, the reason we're to abandon grumbling and moaning is so that the light of Jesus Christ will shine through us.

He says, do all things without grumbling or questioning 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.

And the word blameless, again, it doesn't mean sinless, it means to be free from fault. It means that no one should be able to say of you and your Christian witness that you're always grumbling and disputing.

No one should be able to say that, to say of you that your Christian character is defined by the fact that you're always moaning and muttering about everything in life. And what Paul is reminding us is that the progression of our Christian life is to be filled with joy.

[27 : 34] It's to be a joyful progression. Therefore, as Christians, we're not to be known in our community for moaning and muttering and grumbling and groaning. That's not what should characterize our Christian life.

That's not what should be part of this joyful progression that we're on. No, Paul says, we are to be known in our community as the children of God.

We're to be known as those who have received that spirit of adoption. We're to be known as those who have a father in heaven who takes care of all our cares and our concerns and all our worries.

We're to be known as those who have an elder brother in Jesus Christ who understands everything that we're going through in life. We're to be known as those who have the Holy Spirit indwelling us and ministering to all our needs through the word of God.

My friend, we have this Trinitarian help in our Christian life. Therefore, we have no reason to moan or mutter or grumble and groan.

[28 : 41] Instead, says Paul, we are to shine like lights. We're to shine like lights in the midst of a crooked and twisted or perverse generation.

And when Paul said this, he wasn't referring to any specific generation because every generation is crooked and perverse because of sin. But what Paul was emphasizing was that we are to stand out from that crooked and perverse generation that we're living in.

We are to shine like lights. Literally, Paul says that the Christian is to shine like stars. We're to shine like stars.

And you know, it's such a vivid illustration, isn't it? It's only when the sky is completely dark at night and it's against the black canvas of the night that you can see all these stars shining brightly.

And Paul says, that's what you're to be like. You're to stand out from the darkness. You're to be distinct from the night that surrounds you. You're to be a light in darkness.

[29 : 53] You're to shine like stars in your home and in your workplace and in your community. And you know, I don't know about you, but maybe you think that you're just like a little poor star that barely lights up the vastness of the night sky.

Because maybe you're so quiet in your witness. you don't say much, maybe just the odd word here and there if somebody speaks to you about the Lord. But you know, I was looking this up, it's really interesting.

It's estimated that the light of a star, because it's so far away, the light is four years old before it reaches us. Therefore, the star, it has been shining for four years before it's even noticed.

And you know, sometimes that's like the Christian. Their progression and their growth and their development, it takes time, it takes effort, it requires patience and perseverance.

Because when it comes to your Christian witness, you have to be, you have to have a faithful witness and an obedient witness. You have to continuously shine like stars.

[31 : 02] And maybe after four years, maybe even longer, the light of your patient and persistent witness will eventually be seen.

The consistency of your Christian witness will be seen. And people will take notice. And maybe they'll even ask you, they'll ask you about the source of your light. Where do you get your light from?

And so what is the source of our light? Paul says here, he says, it's the word of life. The source of your life, the word of life. It's the gospel.

So we're to hold fast the gospel because, as one commentator says about this, if we hold fast the gospel, we will hold forth the gospel. If we hold fast the gospel, we will hold forth the gospel.

We will witness and testify to the fact that it's because of the gospel, because of this good news, it's because of it that we're growing, we're developing, we're maturing, and we're becoming more and more like Jesus.

[32 : 12] And so as Paul gives a lesson on the joyful progression of the Christian life, he says that spiritual growth, it involves working, and it involves witnessing, and just in a word, it involves worshipping.

Worshipping. He says in verse 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.

Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me. And so in these verses, Paul describes his life as a drink offering.

Now the drink offering, it's mentioned in Exodus 29, where the Lord commanded the people to offer daily, both morning and evening.

They were to sacrifice a lamb, and as the lamb was being sacrificed, put onto the altar, they were to pour over it the drink offering. The drink offering was a mixture of flour, oil, and wine, and it was to be poured over the sacrifice.

[33 : 21] And this was a daily offering to the Lord, both morning and evening. Regardless of what day it was, or what other sacrifices were being offered, this daily offering of the lamb and the drink offering, it had to be made.

And so what Paul is saying here is that his whole Christian life, every day that he's a Christian in this world, progressing towards the finish line, every day he's a Christian in this world, whether in the morning or in the evening, he says his Christian life is an offering of worship to the Lord.

And because the Lord has worked in him, it's his responsibility to work out his salvation. It's his responsibility to discover and learn and grow in the knowledge of what God has done in his life through Jesus Christ.

It's his responsibility to live a life of faith and obedience to the Lord. It's his responsibility to pour his whole Christian life out as an offering of worship to the Lord.

God. And you know, this is why Paul said to the Romans in chapter 12, I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God, because this is your spiritual worship.

[34 : 49] My friend, it's because of what Jesus has done for you that your whole Christian life is to be poured out as an offering of worship to the Lord. Your whole life, morning and evening, day after day, this progression, it's all to be about worshipping the Lord.

Offering your life as an offering of worship to the Lord. And that's how Paul concludes. He says, likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

you too should offer your life as an offering of worship to the Lord. And so as Paul gives a lesson on the joyful progression of the Christian life, he says that our spiritual growth involves working, witnessing and worshipping.

Working, witnessing and worshipping. So may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Heavenly Father, we give thanks that the Lord, the God who has begun that good work in us, and that we have this great promise that the Lord, one who will bring it on to completion.

But help us, we pray, not to become lax in our Christian life. Help us not to be lazy, for it's so easy for the devil to come in and to convince us that we don't need to do things that would benefit us spiritually.

[36 : 22] Lord, help us, we pray, to work out our own salvation day by day with fear and trembling, to marvel at and to consider and even to learn of what God has done in us through his son, Jesus Christ.

O Lord, we bless thee for the work of salvation. We thank thee, Lord, that that work is going on in our life day by day. and help us, we pray, that as we begin each day, that we would present our whole life upon the altar of the Lord, presenting our bodies as a spiritual act of worship, giving ourselves over to thee, that thou, Lord, wouldst use us for thine own glory, for the furtherance of thy kingdom, and always to lift up the name of Jesus, that he would increase and that we would decrease.

Lord, bless us together, we pray, watch over us and do us good, and go before us for Jesus' sake. Amen. We shall bring our time to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 8.

Psalm 8, in the Scottish Psalter, page 207. Psalm 8, in the Scottish Psalter, page 207. Psalm 8, we're singing from the beginning down to the verse marked 4.

As you know from the Psalm, David, he praises the Lord for the glory of the starry frame, and he considers the moon and the stars, and he wonders why God would look upon him at all.

[38 : 07] How excellent in all the earth, Lord, our Lord, is thy name, who has thy glory far advanced above the starry frame. From infants and from suckling's mouth, thou didst strength ordain, for thy foe's cause, that so thou mightst, the avenging foe restrain.

Down to the verse marked 4 of Psalm 8, to God's praise. Thou excellent in all the earth, Lord, our Lord, is thy name.

God of Young, Christ sire him, who magnificent in all the sun and the mountains.

Thank you for being Instagram in allende blue and the sun, you know all the sun and Strategy four and Hafen donb Ummah's back to us. Thank you for sharing with hands and tulle who they are oil and they are oil and the earth, the reasons Our death is death or gain.

For I've lost cause that soar the might, The avenging for restraint.

[39 : 41] When I look up unto the hands, Which thy long fingers raised, Unto the moon, unto the stars, Which were by thee ordained.

And say, I bought this man, But he remembered is by thee.

Or what the Son of man that thou So kind to him should be.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.