

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2021

SERMON: "FAITH + OBEDIENCE = The "Mind of Christ"!"

TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

Have you ever heard of a gentleman by the name of George Mueller? If you haven't, it is well worth your time to get to know him. George Mueller was a Christian minister and missionary who lived from 1805 – 1898 and predominantly lived in the city of Bristol England. He was well known in his day and, during a missionary trip to Canada and the United States from 1877-78 was invited to visit President Rutherford Hayes in the White House.

I have been fascinated with Mr. Mueller since I was very young and my father, during one of our family devotional times, read a story about him that was in a Children's devotion book entitled "Living Thoughts for the Children's Hour" by Kenneth N. Taylor, who also was the translator of the Living Bible.

George Mueller was a man of faith. The story that stuck with me was about the orphanage he established in Bristol. He and his wife began with a handful of children and the ministry grew over the years into 5 buildings that could house over 2000 boys and girls. The story is told of a time when there was no food or money to feed the children breakfast. Muller had the children pray before they went to be for God to provide. In the morning there was still no food. George gathered the children at an empty breakfast table and had them pray, acknowledging that God may not want them to eat breakfast. As they prayed there was a knock at the door. When one of the children answered she found a giant bag of rice with no note attached. God had provided. This was the norm rather than an unusual circumstance. There are well documented stories of God providing for the orphans.

George was a man who completely put his faith in God. He did not believe in asking for donations or doing fund-raising for the orphanage. God always provided in amazing ways. By the time Mr. Muller died he had raised over £1.5 million (in today's economy it is the equivalent of £176 million or almost \$307 million Canadian dollars) without asking for it. He also had helped over 10,000 children.

Living a life of complete faith and obedience to Jesus...this is what Paul's message to his churches and to us today is all about. We are going to look at what it means to "work out our salvation..." So let's look at our scripture reading today which is Philippians 2:12-18:

¹² Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. ¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

¹⁴ Do everything without complaining and arguing, ¹⁵ so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. ¹⁶ Hold firmly to the word of life; then, on the day of Christ's return, I will be proud that I did not run the race in vain and that my work was not useless. ¹⁷ But I will rejoice even if I lose my life, pouring it out like a liquid offering to God, just like your faithful service is an offering to God. And I want all of you to share that joy. ¹⁸ Yes, you should rejoice, and I will share your joy.

Paul is teaching the Philippians about joy and unity while he is in jail. He is encouraging them in the work of the Gospel, which is the only thing that matters to him. He has just penned this incredible hymn that describes the mindset and attitude that we are to have as Christ-followers...the "Mind of Christ." We are to take on Jesus' humble mind, His sacrificial mind! Are we

willing to sacrifice all for the sake of the Kingdom of God just as Jesus "emptied" himself? And now Paul applies his words! What clue do we have that we are suppose to take note of what he is about to say? He starts verse 12 with that all important key word "therefore." "Therefore" tells us that something important has been said and now we should ready prepare ourselves for action!

"Therefore, my beloved...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..."

Wait just a minute! Did Paul say to "work" out our salvation? But I thought salvation was a free gift? I thought salvation couldn't be bought. I thought we weren't suppose to have a "works" salvation...it is all about Jesus' sacrifice on the cross?

Would some of the Philippians have been surprised by these words? Throughout church history the idea of "works" and "salvation" in the same sentence have been scandalous. Martin Luther is said to have had a great distaste for the book of James and even called it "straw-like" when compared to other New Testament works due to the fact that James insisted that "faith without works is dead..." (James 2:14-17). The arguments still go on today about "faith alone" and "faith with works."

Obviously Paul was getting at an important point. A point that is necessary in every believer's life. So what is Paul saying?

SALVATION

If we are suppose to "work out our salvation," what is "salvation?" The Latin root of the word is "salve," the ointments used for healing. To be "saved" is to be healed or made whole. If you then take the Greek term "soteria," you add to the meaning the idea of "preservation."

There are many who misunderstand the biblical idea of "salvation." Many believe that the salvation Jesus' offers us is somehow a "one time" purchase. Once you accept it, you have it and there is nothing you can do

to lose it. You can literally “live like the devil” and be saved. When you study what the Bible teaches, you will see that salvation is not a purchase, but a life-long journey that is completed when we see Jesus face-to-face.

Paul was not misguided when he teaches us that salvation is “by grace, through faith” (Eph. 2:8-9). It can’t be earned or bought. We cannot ever be “so good” that God has to let us into heaven. The gift of salvation is free, but what happens AFTER you accept the gift? If someone gives you a puppy for Christmas...it is a free puppy! What happens if you enjoy your free gift, but you don’t feed, water, clean, or care for your puppy? You will eventually have a dead puppy. You yell at the top of your lungs, “But the puppy was free!!!!” Absolutely! But the free gift requires upkeep!

Sadly, I think many churches are paying the price for a good but misguided practice. For so long, many Christians were so intent on getting people to start their Christian walk, to accept Jesus and be baptized, that once it was accomplished, we went searching for the next lost souls and left the new believers to flounder. We made new converts and baptized them, but we didn’t “teach” or “disciple” them on the ramifications of being a follower of Jesus. We literally gave them a map that said “you are here” but the rest of the map was blank. You have accepted a free gift, an important gift, but you did not care for the gift. What do have left...a dead, useless gift that has no meaning or purpose.

After you accept Jesus’ gift of salvation, we are then required to “work it out” or “grow into maturity while we seek to have the “mind of Christ.” The big theological term for this is “sanctification.” Sanctification on a simple level is to “become like God.” We are to depend so totally on God that we start to display the characteristics of God on a daily basis in all that we do. 1 Peter 1:15-16 tells us to:

¹⁵ But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. ¹⁶ For the Scriptures say, “You must be holy because I am holy.”

FAITH & OBEDIENCE

To truly understand Paul's teaching on salvation and the fact that we are justified or saved "by grace through faith," we must understand how important faith, trust, and obedience are in the process of salvation. These are Paul's primary ingredients. Over and over through out Paul's teachings, he instructs us on the importance of the "obedience of faith."

In our scripture reading, Paul first tells the Church to "work out their salvation in fear and trembling" (v.12) and this followed immediately with the command to "do all things without complaining and disputing" (v. 14). Yes, they are suppose to get along, but even more important, they are not to complain and dispute about the tasks that they are called to do for God. They are expected to obey God. They are expected to have the convictions of their beliefs that God will act on their behalf as He promised. They are to believe that the promises of God in Christ are true!

Faithlessness is a huge problem in the church today. We pay lip service to all the wonderful things that God has said he will do...but do we truly believe it when backed into a corner by the world. Many churches are struggling today to exist. I have heard too many Christians say that they trust God, and then in the next breath use the term "but..." "I know that God can provide for our financial needs...but here is the reality. I know that God wants me to do this...but I want to do that..." And we stop and wonder where God is when OUR plans fail. We then stop and pray for "more" faith realizing that it isn't about a quantity – but rather about quality. The Holy Spirit grants us the spiritual gift of faith...we just actually have to use what we are given.

BECOME A "DRINK OFFERING"

Total commitment is what God is expecting of all those who have received His gift! Paul earlier reminded us that Jesus "poured" out himself for us. God became human and dwelt among us and lived like one of us. Jesus left all the splendour and glory of Heaven that was rightfully his so that we might be saved. Now we are asked to give all that we are to Jesus for the same reason. Paul said he was "being poured out as a drink offering..." (v.17). In the Old Testament, often when sacrificing an animal to God on an altar, the one sacrificing would pour wine or oil on it as an "offering." Some speculate that this liquid, when mixed with the sacrifice would create smoke that was a "soothing aroma for God" with the idea of providing food for God which was part of the important idea of hospitality and providing for someone else. In the New Testament during the Last Supper, Jesus picked up the cup and said "this cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood..." (Luke 22:20).

Jesus poured out himself as an offering for us. Paul poured out himself so that the Gospel message would go forward. We are asked to pour ourselves out as an expression of abandoning our old way of living and living in obedience through faith in Jesus. Abandonment, the willingness to put our future in God's hands knowing that all of our futures belong to God.

JOY IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

The benefits for Paul and for Christ-followers today, of a life marked by faith and obedience, is the ability to have joy under any circumstance. Paul was facing death. The Philippians were under incredible persecution.

I want to leave you with a little story that I found attributed to an early 20th century writer known for her works on religion and spiritual practices by the name of Evelyn Underhill. She writes:

“A Christian should be like a sheep dog. When the shepherd wants him to do something, he lies down at his feet, looks intently into the shepherd’s eyes, and listens without budging until he has understood the mind of his master. Then he jumps to his feet and runs to do it. And the third characteristic, which is not less important: at no moment does the dog stop wagging its tail.”

Briscoe, Stuart. The The Preacher's Commentary - Vols. 1-35: Genesis – Revelation (Kindle Locations 231487-231489). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

Let’s pray...