

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Model Spiritual Servants, Part 1: Paul**

Scripture: Philippians 2:17-18

Code: 50-24

Model Spiritual Servants: Paul

For this morning we come to Philippians chapter 2. And the text where we find ourselves begins with verse 17 and runs down through verse 30. This particular portion, Philippians 2:17 through 30, we have entitled, "Model Spiritual Servants," because here we have personal illustrations of three men who can be the pattern for our own Christian life...Paul, Timothy and a man named Epaphroditus. And before our study of these three men is over you will have virtually an example that you can pattern your life after in terms of godly living.

Before we look particularly at the text, let me just say a few personal things that will maybe help us find our way along to specific meaning in this marvelous passage. If you know me personally and even if you don't, you can probably assume it's true, you know that I love books and I spend a lot of time reading books. In fact, books are a major preoccupation of my life. There is rarely ever a day in my life when I am not reading. That's just part of my life which I love very much.

And in the process of reading I not only collect information, but in the process of reading I make friends with people who write because typically if I find an author whose heart comes through in his writing, there's a bond that begins to develop over years and years of reading. And so I've made many great friendships with saints of God who are now with the Lord because I have imbibed so much of their heart, so much of their soul, so much of their mind in the process of reading their writings on the Word of God.

One such man is a gentleman by the name of F.B. Meir(?), some of you who have studied the Bible may know that name. He was born in London, England, he was educated at London University. And for many, many years he was a faithful teacher, a faithful preacher and a faithful writer of commentaries and devotional books. God used him in a profound way, and still is using him today...I noticed in one of the catalogs I receive from one of our publishers here in this country that a new book by F.B. Meir is coming out, it's likely a reprint of something he wrote long ago, not necessarily something that was just discovered. But his material is fresh, in demand, insightful, rich. He died in 1929 so he has been with the Lord for a rather long time.

At the age of 82 he was still going fully ahead in his ministry preaching, teaching, writing, being used of God. He was a man with great distinction both in what he knew and what he said and in the way

he lived, a man who basically earned great respect, a man who was admired as a spiritually deep man. He had a warm, loving heart for Christ. It's very evident from his writings that he was very close to Christ in his personal relationship.

But at the age of 82 he was asked to sum up his life in a statement or two to which he responded with these words, "I have only one ambition, to be God's errand boy." Only one ambition, to be God's errand boy. F.B. Meir, like many others, had the heart of a humble servant, selfless, one who was willing to give himself up in the simplest task not for his own fulfillment or his own gain, but for the sake of the Lord he loved. And really it was his humble, selfless, serving heart that made him so useful to the Lord his God. He ministered out of a deep, personal, intimate relationship with Christ that just oozes out of the writings that he has left us. He is a far cry from the superstar mentality of today or the celebrity emphasis, a very humble, a very meek and yet a very deep and profound man. He understood what Jesus meant in Matthew chapter 20 when He said, "He that would be great among you shall be your servant." He understood the principle that greatness rises out of sacrifice. And he is a man in many ways who followed the model of Paul, who followed the model of Timothy, who followed the model of Epaphroditus.

And so, in a very real sense from my life he is sort of a step between Paul and me, somebody among many that I can model my own life and pattern my own life after. But it all goes back to the biblical pattern and here in Philippians chapter 2 we find the Apostle Paul offering himself, his beloved son Timothy, and his dear friend Epaphroditus as models of spiritual life, as models of spiritual service for us to follow.

And why has he come to this point? Well let me just remind you of what you already know in case you may have let it slip. In this particular text Paul has been emphasizing the importance of humility. In fact, when he began chapter 2 it was humility that was on his mind. In verse 3 he says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not merely look out for your own personal interest but also for the interest of others. And have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." And then he goes on to talk about how in verse 8 he humbled himself. So the theme of the first six verses is humility and Christ is the great example. Paul is teaching us about the importance of humility.

And then after discussing the importance of humility and discussing how God will honor the humble even as He exalted the the humbled Christ, he then in verses 12 and 13 talks about how we are to work out our salvation. God puts it in, we're to work it out in the way we live. In other words, we're to demonstrate a transformed life in our behavior. So in a humble way we are to work out our salvation. No matter how difficult it gets, he says in verse 14, "Do it without grumbling or disputing."

And so, if we could just sum up everything he said from verses 1 to 16 it would go a little bit like this. We are called to humbly work out our salvation knowing that it is the power of God working in us to do

so in every circumstance and in every difficulty without grumbling and without disputing. And that's the pattern of our spiritual service. Work out your salvation with humility and without complaint.

And now he says let me give you three illustrations, let me put some flesh on the principle so you can see how that works in my life, in Timothy's life and in the life of Epaphroditus. Humility, a non-complaining spirit, working out your salvation in the power of God, that's principle and here is pattern, here is illustration. Three model servants who live their Christian life, who rendered their service to God in humility without grumbling, without complaining, working on to the outside what God had put on the inside.

But there's more here than just three isolated illustrations because there is a tremendously rich note of affection in here. Paul and Timothy and Epaphroditus were all together at the writing of this in Rome. Paul was the prisoner. Epaphroditus had been sent from the Philippian church to minister to Paul's needs. And Timothy was Paul's son in the faith. So they were all bound together here, geographically together, spiritually together, ministerially together, together in heart. They were knit together in a common cause, all working for a common goal. And so there's a rich note of camaraderie, personal affection and love bound up in these three men.

There is also a sense in which all three of them illustrate the same thing. All three of them illustrate selfless, humble, sacrificial service. All three of them illustrate working out their salvation in the power of God. All three of them illustrate a non-grumbling, non-disputing attitude. In that sense they all three illustrate the same thing. And so it's a sort of a rapid fire succession of models for us to follow.

But at the same time there is an element in the testimony of each which is unique to that man. And so I would like to identify Paul uniquely as the humble rejoicer, or the sacrificial rejoicer would be a better way to say it...the sacrificial rejoicer. To identify Timothy as the single-minded sympathizer. And then to identify Epaphroditus as the loving gambler. And I'll have to explain that one, I know. The sacrificial rejoicer, the single-minded sympathizer, and the loving gambler...and in those three ways each one portrays a distinct and unique personality characteristic, spiritual characteristic which is very helpful to us as we look at the matter of living out our life to the glory of God.

Now, remember where Paul's heart is as he comes in to verse 17. He has just said this in verse 16, "I don't want to run in vain and I don't want to toil in vain." Paul ministered out of love. He says in 2 Corinthians 5, "The love of Christ constrains me." But he also ministered out of fear. There was in the heart of Paul a healthy fear. It is expressed on a number of occasions and I'm sure it existed in Timothy and I'm sure it existed in Epaphroditus also. But that fear goes something like this, I'm afraid that my efforts might turn out to be nothing. I'm afraid that I might have run in vain or toiled in vain. He ministered out of a passion and a zeal and a compelling fear that unless he gave his maximum effort, it all might crumble.

He says it another way in 1 Corinthians 3 where he says that he has the fear, in a sense, that even though he has built on the foundation that God laid, namely Christ, that some day his building could be wood, hay and stubble and be burned up. He demonstrates that fear in another way in 1 Corinthians 9:27 when he says, "I'm afraid that in preaching to others I myself could be disqualified morally." So while on the positive side he certainly served Christ out of love. On the negative side there was a healthy fear that made him very compelled and very zealous and very passionate in the way he approached his ministry. And I'm sure that was true of Timothy and I'm sure of Epaphroditus as well. He was compelled to do what he did. He was driven to do what he did. And he knew God had called him and he knew God had gifted him and God had prepared him and God had revealed to him that which he needed to know, and so he wanted to do his work fully and he wanted to do it well.

And so, Paul is a passionate man. You will note that Timothy, too, is a passionate man who is consumed not with his own interest but with the interest of Christ. And you will note that Epaphroditus is a passionate man because verse 30 said he risked his life, he literally gambled with his life, he rolled the dice for his life and became sick near to death for the sake of fulfilling his ministry. So you're dealing with men of passion, men of zeal. These are not indifferent men, they are not apathetic men. They are men driven by the love of Christ on the one hand and the fear of failure on the other hand. And it is, I believe, out of this zeal and passion that they were made to be the men that they uniquely came to be.

My friend, whom I mentioned to you a moment ago, F.B. Meir, has written regarding this passion these wonderful words. "It is certain...he says...that before any service that we do for God or man is likely to be of lasting or permanent benefit, it must be saturated with our heart's blood. That which costs us nothing will not benefit others. If there is no expenditure of tears and prayer, if that love of which the Apostle speaks in another place which costs is lacking, we may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, may know all mysteries and all knowledge, may bestow all our goods to feed the poor but it will profit nothing. Let us rather seek to be poured forth as an offering, then to do much without feeling the least travail of soul. As the fertility of Egypt in any year is in direct proportion to the height that the waters of the Nile measure, so the amount of our real fruitfulness in the world is gauged by the expenditure of our spiritual force." And then he says this. "It was because Moses was prepared to be blotted from the book of God for his people that he carried them for forty years through the desert and deposited them on the very borders of the promised land. It was because Jesus wept over Jerusalem that He was able to send a Pentecost on that guilty city. It was because Paul was prepared to be accursed for his brethren according to the flesh that he was able to turn so many from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God." And then he closes a little quote, "No heart pangs, no spiritual seed," end quote.

F.B. Meir is saying what we know to be true. The people that make a difference in the world are the people with passion and the people with zeal. And so here we meet three men with a passion, a

passion to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, a passion to work out their salvation with humility, a passion to work out their salvation without complaint no matter what circumstances they were in. Spiritual servants of the Lord who lived to exalt Him at any cost, who pursue that exaltation with an abandonment, who then become models for us to follow.

Now this morning we're going to look at Paul. Next week we're going to look at Timothy. And the final week we'll look at Epaphroditus. Let's begin with Paul. We'll call Paul the sacrificial rejoicer. He offered humble, selfless service to Christ but uniquely we see him here as the sacrificial rejoicer. And he presents himself as an illustration. Let's look at verse 17.

"But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. And you too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me." We'll stop there.

Thus does Paul present himself as an illustration of sacrificial joy. Now let me stop at this juncture and bring up a point that might enter our minds, it certainly entered mine and that is when you are preaching to someone else, or when you're using some spiritual truth that you want illustrated and you want to find the right illustration to use, isn't it a bit much to use yourself as the illustration? Wouldn't it have been better for Paul to just talk about Timothy and Epaphroditus without bringing himself in here? Isn't that an act of pride?

Not at all. The answer to the question is not at all. First of all, you must remember that as Paul writes he is under the inspiration of whom? The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit knew Paul's heart perfectly. He knew exactly what Paul was like on the inside and the Holy Spirit did not hesitate to encourage Paul, literally direct Paul to use himself as an illustration.

Let me make the point that needs to be made. The reason that we are reluctant to set ourselves up as the spiritual model is because we know so much about ourselves as to know the model is not what it ought to be. But listen carefully. When a person is truly spiritual and truly godly and truly deep and truly walks in intimacy with God, there is the utter lack of self-consciousness that is present in the hypocrite. And so Paul can rather readily, in fact almost easily use himself as an illustration because it is the reflection of the purest intent and the purest motive, and so it is done with no self-consciousness. It is the expression of a genuinely humble man, of a genuinely spiritual man, of a genuinely godly man and thus it is not a problem for him, as he said in 1 Corinthians, to literally say to us, "Be ye followers of me as I am of Christ." If you find it difficult for you to say that about yourself, and to establish yourself as the standard for others to follow, it is because there is a self-consciousness there about that. That self-consciousness is born out of a sense of inadequacy because you are not before God what you ought to be. Paul on the other hand knows none of that self-consciousness and freely does he express the fact that he is the standard and the model and freely does the Spirit of God encourage him to do that knowing full well what is in his heart. So this is

not a wrong thing to do, it is a right thing to do. It is just that there are very few who can be self-conscious and humble and so deeply godly that they can do it as Paul does it so easily. So he is the first illustration, rightly so, and it is godly for him to say so because it is the truest reflection of his pure heart.

Now this then is his testimony. It is his testimony of his life's service. And what he says here in verse 17 and 18 is that I am gladly offering my life, I am gladly sacrificing my life and I find great joy in doing so.

Let me give you a little bit of the imagery, all right? It's very vivid imagery here. It's the imagery of sacrifice which was so very familiar to ancient people. We talk about sacrifice today, we don't know what that means. We don't know what a real sacrifice is, we've never seen anybody sacrifice a lamb or a ram or a goat, we've never seen that. We don't have that kind of thing in our culture so we don't have the very vivid sense of sacrificial perspective and imagery that the readers of the Philippian letter did and the people in Paul's time did. But Paul is talking about an altar and he's talking about an animal and he's talking about blood and he's talking about suffering and he's talking about pouring out a libation, or otherwise called a drink offering. That's the imagery that's in his mind. And as he looks at his life and realizes that he is to humbly and without complaint work out his salvation, he recognizes that in doing that he will have to offer himself as a sacrifice which he gladly does. And he says this is what you are, of course, to follow, this is the pattern.

Now let's see what he specifically means, all right? What he specifically means. Verse 17, he says, "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering." Now I want to talk about that for a moment. What is that? What is a drink offering?

Well in the ancient world of sacrifice...by the way, both the Jewish and the pagan world had these kinds of drink offerings...this is what typically would happen. After the animal on the altar had been killed and was being burned up, there was a final sort of capper, a final topping off of that sacrifice where the offerer came and took wine, sometimes they used water, occasionally we even have illustration of them using honey, but predominantly wine, and pouring wine either on the ground in front of the altar or on top of the burning sacrifice in which case it would vaporize immediately into steam and go into the air, symbolizing the rising of that sacrifice into the nostrils of the deity for whom it was being offered.

So Paul says I am now offering my life as this final topping off libation or drink offering upon another sacrifice. This is the completion of this full sacrifice. By the way, if you want some Scriptures to look up on that, 2 Kings 16:13 describes the Jewish drink offering. Jeremiah 7:18 talks about the pagan drink offerings. And Hosea 9:4 notes that the drink offering was wine. And those are just selected out of a number of Scriptures.

The process went like this. The offerer came and before the altar the animal was killed, put on the altar, burned. At some point during the burning the drink offering was poured out as the final sacrificial act. And that is exactly what Paul has in mind. He sees this whole sacrificial scene...now note this...but what he sees his sacrifice as is the drink offering, the final touch to another sacrifice.

Now let's go back to verse 17 with that in mind and see its unfolding. He begins, "But even if I am being poured..." and so forth. Now let me just mention "But even if," if I might. "Even if" is a first-class conditional in the Greek which means that it indicates something that is so. So it should be translated "since." But since I am being poured out. "I am being poured out" is in the present tense, so whatever it is he's referring to it is going on right now. Some people have tried to make this verse refer to his martyrdom, to his future death in the event that he would be executed while imprisoned here, or whenever his martyrdom came that he had that in mind. No, this is not a future, this is a present tense. There is no reason to push this into a future interpretation, he is talking about something that is going on right now. So he is saying even if, and it is the case, I am presently being poured out as a drink offering. Note this, he saw then not his death as a sacrifice, but his life as a sacrifice in which his death was only the culmination. His whole life was a drink offering. His whole life had been poured out. It is happening right now. I am being spendomi, I am being poured out presently. It cannot mean his death, it can end with his death but he is talking about his sacrificial life. Here he is because of the cause of Christ a prisoner, chained to a Roman soldier twenty-four hours a day, he is bound, he cannot carry on his ministry the way he had been free to carry it on prior to this time. And in the difficulty of being chained to a Roman soldier, no privacy and under whatever kind of abuse that might have involved, he sees himself as pouring out his life as an offering to be pleasing to God.

Now note this. This kind of sacrifice is a willing one and Paul was making it with a willing heart. By the way, those who think that Paul's referring to his death are assuming that he was anticipating that he might die. But I don't sense that he really felt he was going to die, it was a remote possibility. But back in chapter 1 verse 24 even though he was in chains he says to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake and convinced of this I know I shall remain. And in chapter 2 verse 24, "I trust in the Lord I myself shall also be coming shortly." All of his indications are that he's going to live and he sees the present sacrifice that he is making for the cause of Christ, a drink offering being poured out.

Now follow the thought in verse 17. Since I am being poured out as a drink offering, upon the sacrifice and the sacred ministry of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. Now did you notice there is a greater sacrifice than the drink offering? The drink offering is Paul's sacrifice, the greater sacrifice he indicates is that of the Philippian church. Did you see that? This is a very powerful point. I'm poured out as a drink offering on top of or upon the real sacrifice which is your sacrifice. You are making the great sacrifice, I am just the topping off of it.

And the question comes immediately. Now why does he say this? Why does he say to the Philippians yours is the great offering, yours is the real sacrifice, mine is just a little drink offering poured on the top? Why does he say that?

Well in the first place, we know that the Philippians were suffering greatly for their faith. Go back to chapter 1 verse 29, well verse 28, he says, "I don't want you to be in any way alarmed by your opponents." Don't be alarmed by your opponents. Then go down into verse 29, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake." So they have opponents, they are suffering for the sake of Christ. Then verse 30 says, "You're even experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me and now here to be in me." You're going through what I'm going through.

They were in a hostile environment. They were in an ungodly environment. They were in a pagan culture. And it was bringing on them that persecution which is indicated there in those verses. So Paul says yours is the great sacrifice. You are the one suffering as you proclaim Christ in Philippi. Mine is just the pouring out a libation on top of your great sacrifice.

Now does this tell you something about Paul's character? What did we say the theme was of the first six verses of Philippians 2? What is it? Humility, isn't it? Do you see his humility there? Did Paul not just say...go back to chapter 2 verse 4...Do not merely look out for your own personal interest but also for the interest of others, and even stronger than that...verse 3...with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as...what?...more important than himself? Do you understand why now he sees theirs as the major sacrifice and his as the minor one? It simply is the reflection of the humility of his heart. This is not a proud man, this is a humble man. This is not a man who can be accused pride by it because he used himself as an illustration, this is a man whose humility comes out in the very way in which he uses himself as an illustration. He thought more of the great sacrifice of the Philippians than he did of his own. And that's just contrary to human nature.

I mean, some of us might be saying, "Lord, why am I a prisoner? Why am I chained to a Roman soldier when I have lived a godly life, when I have served you faithfully, when I have proclaimed the truth, why is it so hard on me and the Philippian church over there is free and they're moving around and having a wonderful time and look how much more I've done for you than the Philippians...no, it's not that kind of thinking at all. That's the thinking of a proud, self-serving heart. Paul never asked the question...why am I suffering? He never asked the question...why am I in chains? He said this is my drink offering, a very small one compared to the great one which you have offered in your service to Christ. This is a humble heart.

Now notice that phrase "upon the sacrifice and service of your faith." The sacrifice they were making was really the giving of their lives the cause of Christ...preaching, teaching, proclaiming, living for Christ. And he calls it "the service of your faith...the service of your faith." The word "service" is



leitourgia from which we get liturgy. Why? Because it means sacred service, religious service, priestly service. It would be so used in the Septuagint. It's used of Epaphroditus in verse 25, it says of him there that he offered spiritual, liturgical, sacred ministry or sacred service.

So Paul looks at them and he sees them as priests. Just like Peter says, holy priests, royal priests, 1 Peter 2. And he sees the Philippians as priests who are offering up their lives as a sacrifice, and his by comparison is just a little topping off compared to theirs. They were a faithful people. They were a sacrificial people. He rejoiced over them. He just rejoiced over them because of their faithfulness to the Lord.

In chapter 4 verse 18 he says that the money you sent me which was sacrificial, they didn't have as much as they sent, they sacrificed. They didn't have that much to spare. And he said what you have sent, the end of verse 18, with Epaphroditus, what you sent is a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice well pleasing to God. You see, he saw their life as the major sacrifice and it was demonstrated in the generosity with which they were endeavoring to meet the needs of Paul in a monetary way by sending money to him. But they were a sacrificial people. His life was just the topping of that sacrifice.

But let me go a step further. You can't just look at this as comparing them a greater and a lesser sacrifice. There's a sense in which there's a unity here as well, and it's really one sacrifice, for it was customary that the sacrifice was laid on the altar and then the one who brought the sacrifice poured out the drink offering as the final element of that one sacrifice. So what Paul is really saying is you and I together are offering to God the sacrifice of our life. There is a real loving, loyal sort of brotherly act in this sacrifice. He sort of ties his heart with the Philippians and says...I don't mind a bit being a part of your sacrificial service to Christ, together we are offering ourselves.

So he had reached a common altar with the people he loved and they had reached a common altar with the Apostle they loved. And that's why we say that Paul here illustrates sacrifice. His whole life was a sacrifice. But notice the attitude that went along with it, all right? Back to verse 17, this is key. He says, "Since I am being poured out as an offering, I rejoice." The "I rejoice" connects to the "since I am being poured out." It's the fact that one led to the other.

Why are you rejoicing? Do you know why I'm rejoicing? I'm rejoicing because I am being poured out as an offering.

You say, "Wait a minute." It's not joy in spite of, get this, will you, it's joy because of. Can you handle that? It is not joy in spite of, it is joy because of. What do you mean? What I mean is that the highest expression of Paul's life was to give himself a sacrifice therefore built into it was the greatest experience of joy.

Did you ever sit back and say...how can...how can such-and-such a missionary live under those conditions? How can such-and-such a missionary go to that place, stay in that place, endure what they endure for years and years and years? How can they handle that? I'll tell you how, because they view life as a sacrifice well pleasing to God. The greater the sacrifice, the greater the joy, the more supreme the offering the greater the exhilaration. That's the bottom line. It is not joy in spite of, it is joy because of. And we will affirm in the testimony of Paul here that his greatest joy came at the time of his greatest sacrifice and the reason some of us know so little about that level of joy is because we know nothing about that level of sacrifice. And so we can't relate, it's difficult to relate to that. His joy was in the sacrifice, his joy was in the offering because that is that for which he lived. That's why he said...if I live I live to the Lord, if I die to the Lord, either way I'm the Lord's. That's why he said, "I count not my life dear to myself, I just want to finish what the Lord gave me to do." And his greatest joy came at the point of his greatest sacrifice because that was his greatest goal.

So he is saying to the Philippians, "Don't worry about me, folks, I've never been so happy." They were concerned, they sent Epaphroditus, they sent money, they want to meet his needs, they're burdened about him. And what does he say to them, verse 17, "I rejoice and I share my joy with you all and you too, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me."

What do you mean rejoice in the same way? Well you're going through suffering and you're going through persecution and you're going through opposition, you rejoice too and I'll rejoice and we'll rejoice together that you have put your lives on the altar, that I have poured my life on the altar that it is all well pleasing to God and in that is our great joy.

This whole epistle, as you know, is full of joy. Back in chapter 1 verse 4, he has joy every time he thinks about them. He prays for them with joy in every prayer. Every time he thinks of them he has joy. He has joy because the gospel is being preached, verse 18, Christ is proclaimed and in this I rejoice and I'll continue to rejoice even though they're criticizing me. He has joy because of his love for them, chapter 4 verse 1, "My beloved brethren, whom I long to see, my joy and crown," and he calls them again "my beloved" at the end of the verse. In verse 10, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me." He not only rejoiced in his love for them, he rejoiced in their love for him, he rejoiced every time he thought about them, he rejoiced in their sacrifice. This is a time for joy.

And so he says to them, "You rejoice, don't be sorry for me, you rejoice, I'm sharing my joy with you, you share your joy with me." You see this joy, beloved, is not related to circumstances at all, but most of our joy is. If the circumstances are positive, we have an earthly joy. If the circumstances are negative, we lose our earthly joy. Many Christians have never known the exhilaration of a spiritual joy born out of sacrifice. But here he says I rejoice and I share my joy, sunchairo, together we are glad...he says. This then is the model of what we'll call the sacrificial rejoicer. This man, Paul, is

amazing because what he shows us is that the greater the sacrifice, the greater...what?...the joy. And that's so foreign to most of us. And we look at a person like a missionary or someone who is devoted to the work of God in a hard place, destitute, alone, hard-pressed, uncomfortable, miserable by human standards, and we say..."How can they endure that? What a miserable existence." And quite the opposite is the truth because in their ultimate sacrifice they have found the ultimate spiritual joy which we know so little about but which is a gift of the Spirit of God to the ultimately obedient sacrificial believer.

Paul, by the way, refers to this same kind of joy on a number of occasions. Second Corinthians 7:4 he says, "I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction." I am overflowing with joy in all our afflictions. See, he's a perfect illustration of not grumbling, isn't he? It didn't matter what was happening to him, he continued to rejoice with joy.

Colossians 1:24, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake," he says. First Thessalonians chapter 3 verse 7, he talks about distress and affliction. And then in verse 9, "What thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice?" He was rejoicing in the midst of affliction again.

So here you have this sacrificial rejoicer and this is so typical. I have read Foxes Book of Martyrs a number of times, I have read many different things of the early church. I have read about martyrs that died, I think there are few martyrs in history who died and left any kind of record anywhere that I haven't read at some point in my life, and I read and read and what I hear every time I read these things is how they rejoice as they're being burned at the stake, how they rejoice as they're being crucified, how they rejoice as they're being whipped. And your flesh says...well how can they do that? And you go back to the fact that ultimate sacrifice produces ultimate joy.

Again, F.B. Meir said, "It was thus that the martyrs pressed to the scaffold and stake rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's name." And then he says, "When once the soul has caught sight of the true significance of life and has learned the privilege which is within its reach of identifying itself with the Son of God in His great act of redemption, a similar glow of joy begins to cast its radiance over passages of light that hitherto had been dark and forbidding." Boy, that's so true.

You look at trials and difficulties, hard places, physical discomfort, pain and even death as dark and forbidding. But when you get to the point where you totally abandon yourself to the will of God to be pleasing in His sight, nothing is dark, nothing is forbidding, light is shed on everything and ultimate sacrifice leads to ultimate joy. And the reason we know so little about that kind of joy is because we know so little about that kind of sacrifice.

for us, you see, the only thing that brings joy is what we do for ourselves, and once in a while the joy of seeing something done for someone else. But I wonder how many Christians really aren't

consumed with the joy that is theirs because of the total sacrifice they have made for Christ. We get joy out of what we do for ourselves, we get some joy out of what we do for others as a satisfaction in feeding the hungry, helping the poor, whatever it might be, helping little children, sick people. But how many of us are exhilarated with joy in the sacrifices we make for the cause of Christ? Let me ask the question, what are you sacrificing in service to Christ? What amount of treasure, what amount of time, what are you sacrificing for the cause of Christ?

I'll put it another way. What have you said no to in order to say yes to God's will? What have you said no to in order to say yes to God's Kingdom? What have you said no to in order to say yes to God's church? That's the question. Paul lived a life of sacrificial joy. And I'm telling you, and I'll say it probably till I die some day, the reason we have such a discontent, unhappy society is because, and even among Christians, they are trying to find joy in possessions rather than in sacrifice where ultimate joy lies. And so they are chasing an illusion.

You say, "Well I don't mind my life, it's not that bad." Well that may be true, God is gracious and you may have a modicum of happiness. But you will never know true joy, surpassing joy, sacrificial joy, the joy that allows a man being burned at the stake to sing with expressions of joy in his lips, the hymns of his great God and Savior, you may never know that exhilarating joy, the joy that comes out of sacrificial giving, sacrificial effort, the greatest joy.

Now let me wrap this up. And I want you to get this, this is really the key. If you're like me you're saying...Well, I'm a long way from the Apostle Paul, how am I going to know this kind of joy? How am I going to experience this level of living? Where did Paul learn it?

Can I tell you where he learned it? He learned it from Christ because it was Jesus Christ in Hebrews 12:2 who endured the cross because of the...what?...joy that was set before Him. Jesus is the perfect illustration of ultimate sacrifice and ultimate joy. Jesus in giving His life, enduring the cross, did so for the ultimate joy of offering to God the ultimate sacrifice that was well-pleasing to Him. Paul learned it from Jesus. And he longed...he longed to learn Christ in his own life.

Look at Philippians chapter 3, and we'll get to this later in our study, but chapter 3 verse 10, look at his prayer, "That I may know Him." You say, "Well you already know Him."

Oh, I want to know Him more, I want to know Him more, more deeply, more fully.

And what about Him do you want to know?

I want to know the power of His resurrection, that is power to give my life as a sacrifice, power to lay everything on the line. And then I want to know the fellowship of His sufferings and I want to know the joy of suffering in ultimate sacrifice. That's what he's saying. You see, he found his model in

Christ, and I believe he found his strength to live out that model in his relationship to Christ. I don't believe...I don't believe there are any gimmicks to this, I don't believe there are any tricks to get to this kind of place. The truth of the matter is as you look at the world and assess it, and look back in history, it seems like most of the sacrificial people lived in another time, doesn't it? They lived in another era. Some people would think that's impossible because Christian counseling wasn't invented yet. How could they deal with their struggles and problems?

But it seems to me that most of the totally sacrificial people lived in another age. Or if they live today, they live in another culture than this one. And yet they knew how to give everything, they knew how to put their life and all they had on the line and in so doing to receive that ultimate joy. How did they know that? The same way Paul knew it, they got close to Christ. They got close to Christ. Everything was flowing out of the relationship to Christ.

Now let me just close, but this is so important, listen. I have a great fear about that because I personally believe that in the doctrine of sanctification, what the Bible basically teaches is that your effectiveness as a Christian is directly related to one thing and that is simply this, your effectiveness as a Christian is directly related to the proximity in which you live in intimate fellowship with Christ. That's the issue. And I don't hear anybody talk about that. That's not the popular thing in the new sanctification. But I believe I can look at a person's life, look at their conduct and their behavior and tell you how intimate and how close their relationship is to the living Christ because that's what dictates the kind and quality of life they live. You see, these kinds of spiritual attitudes that make a person sacrificial and finding joy and sacrifice are attitudes that flow out of Christ's heart because that's how He felt about His sacrifice and it comes to one who is intimate with Him.

The heart and soul of sanctification or spiritual growth or becoming all you need to be is bound up in your union with Christ. It is as an abiding branch that you bear fruit. You were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. You were chosen to become like Him throughout all eternity. And in the time in between while you lived, you are to live in Him and through Him and by Him. And yet the current stress on sanctification mentions very little about Christ, very little about cultivating an intimacy with Him through prayer and the study of God's Word and through longings and affections and deep love for Christ which is cultivated by those disciplines. Today it's gimmicks and formulas and Christian psychology and self-image and introspection, and getting in touch with yourself, and examining your deep problems and searching for clues in how your parents treated you and in your past and fussing around with all that stuff. And it's a diversion away from the solution to people's needs, which is a deep, abiding, penetrating, consuming union with Jesus Christ that is cultivated on a moment-by-moment basis.

This was illustrated to me the other night. It's illustrated to me in a lot of ways, I can think of a lot of them, but this one really hit me hard. I was sitting on the freeway because cars were smashed up everywhere, so I was just sitting there with the engine off waiting for something to happen and

listening to the radio. And on the station came some Christian psychologist who counsel on the local Christian radio station here and a lady called up and she said to them, "I would like to ask you about my problem." And they replied in those very sensitive tones that they often use and said, "Well we'd certainly like to help you, what is your problem?"

She said, "Well, I'm a compulsive person and I have two driving compulsions." She said, "They are food and sex." And she said, "If I'm not being compelled by food, I'm being compelled by my sex desires." And she just said, "You know, I'm a Christian and I just don't know what to do about this."

And their response was, "Well, tell me when you say 'compelled sexually' what do you mean?"

"Oh," she said, "I just go to bed with anyone and everyone. I meet someone and I just...I just have that need."

And then the reply came, "Tell me about your father, what's your relationship like with your father."

"Oh, well, my father was passive. He was there and, you know, I love him, but he was passive."

"Uh-huh, uh-huh, yeah, yep. Now tell me about your relationship to your mother."

"Love/hate," exactly what she said, "love/hate, we love each other, I love her, she loves me but there's also antagonism, she's dominating, she wants to control."

"Oh yeah, uh-huh, yup. And now you're living on your own, aren't you?"

"Yeah."

"Uh-huh, do you realize that you could be doing this to punish your father and mother for the way they treated you? Your father's indifference because he didn't teach you the proper way to live and he didn't give you any guidelines, now you're showing him what you think of that and now you're getting back at your mother who tried to control you by living an uncontrolled life."

"Oh, oh well, I never thought of that."

"You know, what you really need is...you've got to be freed from these wounds that your parents inflicted on you. And you need therapy, you really need therapy."

To which she replied, "Oh I've been in regular therapy with a Christian counselor for a year and it hasn't helped."

"Oh," he said, "well, you see, it's like taking meat out of the freezer," this was the illustration, "you can't just take it out and eat it, it takes a long time to thaw. And it's going to take a long time for these feelings to thaw out."

And there I was all alone sitting there on the freeway and I said..."Garbage." And I don't know what the guy next to me thought because I think it said it loud three times. Garbage!

You say, "What would you have said to that woman?" I would have said to that woman, for whom I feel nothing but compassion, I would have said, "Dear woman, if you are living a life of constant fornication, the Bible says fornicators and adulterers do not inherit the Kingdom of God, it is my great fear that you think you're a Christian, but you're not because if you're a Christian you would have a compulsion to serve the Lord God. You might stumble and fall into sin, we all do, but the compulsions of your life would be the compulsions of love and affection for Jesus Christ." So I would have said to her, "I fear you're not a Christian, and you need to fall on your knees and repent before a holy God and plead that His Son would graciously forgive your sin and save you and give you a new nature that hungers after God and thirsts after righteousness."

Secondly I would have said, "Should there be some remote possibility that you're a Christian, my dear lady, you better fall on your knees and cry out to God in repentance lest God strike you dead for your continual sin. Plead with God to be gracious to you and then you need to get into the Word and in prayer and stay there, if need be, for weeks on end until you have sorted out the sin in your soul. And you need to cry out for an intimate ongoing relationship to Jesus Christ which is so rich and so full that the very power of Christ is transferred to your life."

But that's not the popular message today. It's now sanctification without Christ. It's grieving me.

Where did Paul find the strength for this? He said in 3:10, "That I may know Him, I want power from Him, I want joy in suffering that comes from Him." In chapter 4, he knew, in verse 13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Where do you go for your strength, beloved? Where do you go? Christians are running all over the place trying to find strength in everything but an increasingly growing intimate profound relationship with the living Christ cultivated out of prayer, time in the Word and a growing affection for Him. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Then he says in verse 19, "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus." So all your strength and all your needs are bound up in Christ. And if you go on in to Colossians, all you have to do is go to chapter 2 and read verse 3, "In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom, all the treasures of knowledge." You want strength? It's in Christ. You want your needs met? It's in Christ. You want wisdom? It's in Christ. You want knowledge? It's in Christ. And I'm telling you this, he says in verse 4 of Colossians 2, so nobody deludes you with some persuasive argument. He says I want you to remain disciplined, verse 5, I want you to remain stable

in your faith in Christ. Verse 6, you received Christ now do...what?...walk in Him. You've been firmly rooted and you're now being built up in Him...that's the key. And verse 8, "Don't let anybody take you captive through philosophy, deception, tradition of men...that's elementary principles, humanism...rather than Christ for in Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form, in Him you have been made complete, He is the head over all."

Beloved, can I be so basic as to say that every Christian's relationship is built on a continuing intimacy with Jesus Christ, therein comes the solution to all life's exigencies. How can Paul live like this? How can he be a prisoner chained to some Roman? How can he go through everything he goes through and have a spirit that says, "I offer my life willingly and I rejoice in this?" I'll tell you how, he was so close to Christ that he knew the very attitudes that were the attitudes of Christ in his own joyful self-sacrifice.

You say, "How do I reach that level?" You have, beloved, may I assure you, dwelling in you the same Christ. Is that so? The same Christ. The only question is whether or not you have appropriated His presence and whether you continue to cultivate that union which will yield for you the fullness of sacrificial joy. Well, let's pray together.

Father, we thank You this morning for the example of this dear man, Paul, who walked with Jesus, who was an abiding branch for whom to live was Christ. So much so that he said, "I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me." Lord, help us to have such an intimacy with Christ. I'm not asking what's your relationship to the church, I'm not asking what's your relationship to your Bible study, what's your relationship to your Sunday School class, what's your relationship to your gift, your ministry. What's your relationship to Christ for it's out of that relationship that everything flows. So, Lord, help us to get back to that. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear what the Word of God reveals as the means of sanctification, that it is intimacy with Jesus Christ, closeness with Him cultivated out prayer, the Word, cultivated out of obedience, cultivated out of a pleading that we might love Him more, know Him better. May Christ be always in our thoughts and may our love for Him increase to the point where we are so lost in the union that His attitude becomes our attitude and sacrificial joy expressed by Him becomes our way of life, and we'll thank You for that hope, that by Your grace we can so live in Jesus' name. Amen.

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