

[saying i do]

:: philippians 4.9 ::

Our text this morning is Philippians chapter 4, verse 9.

It reads like this:

Philippians 4.9 - The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

There seems to be a problem. If we're honest, there seems to sometimes be a disconnect between how the Bible describes Christianity and what we see either in our own lives and in the culture around us.

Every week we read these news stories in order to get a glimpse of what's going on out there and how it relates to us. And, as we do, we're seeing that while the world is growing increasingly hostile to Christianity, many Christians are become less focused on their faith. We're seeing more pastors and church workers 'burning out' and calling it quits from the ministry. We're seeing the younger generation turn it's back on the Church and attempting to redefine what it means to be a Christian altogether in ways that decrease the role of Scripture.

The situation in Philippi wasn't that different. In fact, they had a much closer and more severe relationship with persecution that we experience today. But there was difficulty for them. There were disagreements in the Church. There were false teachings going around. There were quarrels and pressures and economic fears and apathy. In the next verses we'll see that many Christians had quit giving to the work of the ministry. Many people were stumbling in their Christian faith. There was a gap between what had been preached to them and what they were living out day to day.

Throughout this letter, the theme we've seen from the Holy Spirit through Paul again and again is that the life God intends for His people is *very* different than what many Christians are experiencing today.

And Paul, knowing that in our imperfection we are prone to these setbacks, has repeatedly encouraged and strengthened us by saying, 'Don't give up. Don't give in. Don't lose your confidence in who Jesus is and what He wants to do in your life.' Because Paul is the living example of the kind of peace and satisfaction and purpose that the Lord intends for Christians. God intends that we be people that are just confounding to those in the world. People who can laugh happily as we give our money away and sing when we're chained up in a dungeon. People who can find excitement when we're beaten for the cause of Christ and who can brush off criticism or hatred. People whose faith is so strong that we could hear from the Lord and say to a mountain, 'Uproot!' and it would be done if it be His will.

So, why is there a disconnect? Why is it that we often miss out on all those things that Jesus said have *already* been given to us? Things that *already* characterize us, since we belong to God?

I believe the answer is found in this letter and even in this verse, where, as we read, Paul says:

Philippians 4.9a - The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do.

Paul was an apostle and had special office and authority given to him by God. Yet, he also is an example to us of how the Christian life is meant to work out.

Unlike the Philippians, we do not have the privilege of knowing Paul personally. We know him through his writings. But we can still take up this challenge he gives us, even within the confines of the 4 chapters in this book.

It was an interesting exercise for me to go through this entire letter and just write down the various attitudes and habits and characteristics of Paul that I saw demonstrated through this letter. I filled a page of just quick bullet points of what we see in him. How he was filled with the Spirit. How he had such confidence in Christ. His boldness, but also his humility. His contentment, but also his incredible, confident vision. His love for believers and his trust in the Lord.

As I went through, the list became bigger and bigger, as I see how lovely a relationship with Jesus is when it is unhindered by my unwillingness. And to me, that is the key. Because if you go through and just try to list out the attributes of Christianity as demonstrated in Paul, you discover very quickly that they aren't things that we could live up to on our own. Yet they are given to us by the Holy Spirit as the *example* of what God desires to do within each and every one of us.

So, how did Paul get there? We've learned and received and heard and seen him on the pages of Scripture. We revere him for his life and his service to the Lord. He's the Apostle of Apostles to us. But, how is it that he attained this level of contentment and satisfaction in the Lord that many of us feel we're missing?

Based on Scripture, I think it's very simple: We simply choose not to do it.

Doctrinally speaking, we *have* the ability to receive the fullness of Christ because of His power and presence in our lives. God will never command us to do something that He does not also help us accomplish. And so, the reason for the shortcoming must be that we choose to draw back, we choose to settle for less than what God wants for us in this life.

Paul himself was guilty of this at one point. Here's a section of Acts chapter 9:

Acts 9.3-6a - As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick

against the goads.” So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

Paul kicked against the goads. He put barriers up between himself and God, who wanted to do something incredible with his life. But when he relinquished control of himself to the God of love, when he laid down his life in submission, that’s when he started on the path that led him to the life we see all over the New Testament.

What happens is that we will sometimes get into a jam or we’ll want to receive something from God and the natural, human perspective is, ‘What to I have to do to *earn* that from the Lord?’ When Jesus said, ‘Abide in me and you will bear fruit.’ That’s what we’re called to.

That’s the second half of our verse this morning after all -

Philippians 4.9 - The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

This is the answer to our struggles and our fears and our shortcomings in the Christian life: To understand that God still wants what He wanted all the way back in the Garden of Eden - to walk with His people in the cool of day. To be *with* them.

The Christian life isn’t like studying for a test, hoping that we do enough to pass that final exam. The Christian life is about embracing a God who has love for us and plans for us and help for us.

And so, as I listed out those things which Paul demonstrated through this letter, I discovered very quickly that, like the Old Testament law, they aren’t things I can attain on my own. Christ does them in me. But I also discovered that many times they *were* things that I resist in my life.

Evangelizing. *But Lord, I’m nervous...I’m afraid!*

Being obedient. *But Lord, I’m not sure You know what’s best!*

Not thinking more highly than I ought to think. *But Lord, I’m pretty awesome!*

Pressing on. *But Lord, I’m discouraged, and this person doesn’t deserve my love.*

Not complaining. *But Lord, I like complaining.*

As I looked at this list, I saw how in my own life my flesh builds up a resistance against these things that Jesus wants to accomplish. I saw that, if I take an honest look within, I’m trying to hold onto my resentment toward my enemies. How I am selfish and restrain myself from being more sacrificial. How I set my mind more on earthly things than heavenly ones.

And if I kick against the loving direction of Jesus, then I am always going to miss out on the incredible blessings He’s prepared for me. God comes to me, as His beloved child and says, ‘I want to build in your life (for example) a loving unity with other believers. Do you want that?’ And I answer, ‘Yes Lord! Of course I do!’ And He says, ‘Give me your pride and your reputation. Give me control over your interests. And I will do it.’

Now I’m at the place of decision. In my flesh I think, ‘Yes, I’ll be happy to live in unity with others when they recognize my rights and when they apologize and when they benefit me and meet my standard of whatever.’

And there! I've put a barrier up between my heart and God's transforming.

We see this happen a lot on the pages of Scripture. The easy one is Jonah. Or even as we saw a few weeks ago on Sunday mornings, Joab. We know what the will of the Lord is. We know His grace and His compassion. But we choose to go the other way because we have an agenda that we want accomplished.

We see the multitudes hearing Jesus teach but turning away, going home and allowing that seed to be wasted.

And it still happens today. All around us we can see Christians settling for less than what God wants for them. People who settle for a life that is characterized by a standard of morality that is somewhat better than that of the world, but lacking the kind of peace and expectation and vision and compassion and joy and purpose that Christians are *called* to receive. We see Christians that have settled for a life that views relationship with God as a 'get-out-of-hell-free' card, without much if any transformation. The Bible calls that kind of mentality being lukewarm.

And Paul pleads with us in this letter to not settle for that kind of life. He describes to us a personal God who seeks to walk with us on the road of life and fill us up as we go. We've learned and received and heard from him that God intends a heavenly life for us, even on this side of eternity, and then we've seen in him that it actually works. That even in the worst of circumstances, in the prison of Rome or the very fires of Babylon, a Christian can be so peaceful, so powerful, so greatly satisfied and unobstructed by the cares and pressures of this world. That's what our faith is meant for.

Our part is to learn, to receive, to hear and to see and then to **do**. To obey the Lord all the way. To love God and abide in Him. To choose to do what we're called to do. We're called to love God, not ourselves. We're called to serve, not be served. We're called to rely on the Lord, not on our money or our economy or our society. We're called to focus on heaven and the soon coming of the Jesus Christ. We're called to stop complaining. We're called to *not* settle for less than the life that God wants for us and we are **able** to do these things. God **will** come in if we allow Him in. He is knocking on those corners of our hearts. He's asking us for our lives so that He can do those things that we desire yet seem to elude us.

But, if we say, 'Lord, You can have 3 corners, but not the fourth,' then we're settling for a Christianity that is not complete. We're settling for Spiritual mediocrity. We're settling for less than our gracious God has set aside for us and we're putting a barrier between our hearts and our Jesus.

We've learned God's word and we continue to do so.

We've received God's Holy Spirit and the gifts that He's distributed to us.

We've heard the call of God on our lives.

We've seen the power of Christ lived out through His people, all over the world for thousands of years.

And now it's time to **do**.

I do encourage you to take a few minutes to write out what we've seen in Paul throughout this letter. Little bullet points of what God intends for His people, demonstrated by this apostle. Then look within and evaluate where you're at with those things. Whether you've built up barriers between your heart and God's transformation.

Then remember that the God of peace is with you, waiting to transform and overflow you and then choose to **do**. Don't settle for a lukewarm Christianity.

Walk with Jesus in the Garden of your life today. And see Him do in you what He's wanted to do since before the world was formed.