

Fil-Am Community Church

Final Words of Wisdom...

Sunday 6/5/2011

Pastor Chris Ireland

I am Pastor Chris Ireland and am really glad ya'll are here today. I have been preparing this message for almost a year now, ever since we found out we were going to Germany. I am really excited for this opportunity to speak to you today, and am also sad that this will be the last message I get to share with you before we leave. A bittersweet time for me, but an exciting time also, because of what I have seen God do here in our church; and what He has in store for me, and you here as you continue your journey with God.

They teach you in preacher school that a message should be 30 minutes long and have three points. Today we are going to look at three passages of Scripture that have guided me as I have served the children and youth here...and each passage will have one point, so in a way, I am following the tenets of a properly prepared message. With all this said, let's dive right in...

Philippians 2:12 reads from the King James *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."*

Philippians was written by Paul in approximately AD 62. It is one of the prison epistles, written when Paul was a prisoner of Rome. Philippi was located in Macedonia about 10 miles inland on a road connecting the Adriatic and Aegean Seas. It had a small Jewish population. The church in Philippi started as a group of women who would meet outside the city gates because there was no synagogue. Later, the church started meeting at the home of Lydia.

Philippians does not address doctrinal or church order issues, like Galatians and Corinthians does. The church is doctrinally sound. Philippians is about Christian experience. The word joy is found throughout this book. In fact, John McArthur calls Philippians “The Book of Joy.” This is especially amazing considering Paul was led to write this letter when he was a prisoner of Nero, facing execution.

We are going to focus on that last phrase “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” This does not seem to make sense at first glance. We have learned that salvation is of God.

John 3:16 says *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

Acts 16:31 *“...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...”*
If salvation is through faith, the act of believing, how do we “work out our own salvation?”

The song we just sang “There is a Way” has the refrain “the truth and the life and the way.” This is very Biblical;

John 14:6 reads in The King James *“...I Am the way, the truth and the life: No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.”*

All of us, everyone, has a belief in something. Everyone; Christians, Atheists, Buddhists, Agnostics...everyone. There is a truth that forms the basis of our reality. As Fox Mulder from the X-Files used to say “The truth is out there.” Some people place their faith in science, some place their faith in logic, some place their faith in the goodness of man, some in only what can be seen and felt. As Christians, we know that truth is found in God’s Word. The Bible is written by God and is true.

2 Timothy 3:16 says from The King James *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”*

Do you know what The Bible is? It is a handbook. It is Gods' instruction manual on how to live life. We do not need to add anything to it, we definitely do not take away from its' words. God gave us everything in His word that we need to know to live life.

I know that God's Word is true, and can counter every argument people present for discounting Gods Word. People who place their faith in science, **Romans 1:20** says *"For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."*

People who place their faith in logic, 1 Corinthians 1:25 "the foolishness of God is wiser than men..." People who place their faith in the goodness of man, **Jeremiah 17:9** *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"*

As we see, our truth is based on the Word of God. God says in His Word, He came to give us life. In **John 10:10b** Jesus Himself says reading from The King James again "...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

In **John 15:11** He says *"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."*

So, back to my first question. If salvation is of God through Jesus to bring us back into a relationship with God the Father so we can live a full, joy filled life...what does God mean when He says through Paul to "...work out your own salvation?"

Let me tell you a story as it was told me by Dr. Marv Penner at the Youth Specialties Convention I attended in Nashville, TN last November. Dr. Penner was teaching a spirituality class at a Bible college in the U.S. He started his class by having the students turn to Psalm 103 and write on a particular verse that spoke to them. Psalm 103 starts "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who

redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things..." As he was speaking, a girl from the back of the room yelled out "That's crap!" but in much stronger language...in a spirituality class...in Bible college. She said her mom had a chronic disease for years and she prayed every day that God would cure her, and now she's dead; and now she has the same symptoms. So she doesn't believe God heals all diseases. She thought God was a liar.

See, she was a Christian, but didn't believe God was true to His word. She had to work out her own salvation. All of us have these times when our knowledge of God and The Bible clash with reality...or reality does not agree with what we know about God.

Another friend of mine lived in Jordan and was used by God in tremendous ways to lead Muslims to faith in Jesus. One Palestinian family lived in Israel. They knew they were saved, they knew the Jews were God's chosen people, they knew God loved them unconditionally. One day, my friends saw them and said they were wandering because the Israelis destroyed their homes, took their possessions, and forced them off their land. How could God allow this to happen? They had to work out their own salvation.

These questions come to all of us. It might be wondering why good, kind people who do not profess faith in Jesus go to Hell. It might be that we love God, serve God, tithe regularly, and believe that as God provides for the birds of the air and the grass of the field, He will provide for us; and then we lose our job and lose our house.

The point is that God says we are to wrestle with our salvation. We do this by remembering God's Word is truth and reading His Word; by praying; by seeking the council of Christian friends and pastors. And remember, we are to do this with "fear and trembling." Let's look at the following video that explains the "Fear of God."

(Frances Chan video Fear God)

The fear of God is awe, reverence...and fear. We need to remember that God loves us, God wants the best for us...but that God is God.

One last thought on working out our own salvation. This is a warning to pastors and teachers and mentors and leaders. When people come to us with their struggles and questions, we sometimes do them a disservice. I think one of the most misused verses in The Bible is **Romans 8:28** that reads *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”*

This is of course true, but it is not always what people need to hear when they are struggling with their situations, when they have lost their job, lost their house, been falsely accused, lost a parent or child, lost a husband or wife. Or, to put it another way, wrestling with their salvation. Sometimes, with God’s guidance, we need to let them struggle and help them know God is consistent and true to His Word, which will lead them to know God a little better than they could have otherwise.

O.k., these next two points need to be short...and they are.

Matthew 16:24 reads from The King James *“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”*

If this verse were written today, it would read “Take up your method of lethal execution and follow me.” In the 1st Century, the cross was the symbol of capital punishment for non-Romans. Crucifixion was considered too cruel for Romans, it was reserved for non-Romans. It’s kind of ironic that we wear crosses around our necks as jewelry today. It would be like wearing little electric chairs on necklaces...or if we lived in France, little guillotines.

So what does Jesus mean when He says to “take up our cross and follow Him?” He is saying that we are to take up our method of lethal execution and follow Him. Actually, in Luke He says to “take up his

cross daily.” But what are we executing? What are we killing? And why are we killing it?

Many of you have heard my testimony, but let me share it with you again...it illustrates this verse.

I really started serving God with the men’s ministry at CRBC in 2002. I was sure I was a Christian when I was 16, but did not really start my journey with Christ until I joined the men’s ministry. I learned, shared, led and had a great mentor in Jim Arthur. I helped some of the men and became very comfortable where God had put me. That’s when God led me to teach computers at CRCS in 2003. There was no reason for me to apply, and certainly no reason for the school to hire me, other than God’s leading. The next year, God led me to lead middle school chapel...again, against my will. I was also led to teach youth Sunday School. Now, this may surprise you, but I did not want to teach youth...youth scared me. But, I followed God’s leading and agreed...but on one condition; that He not give me 8th grade boys. But God in His wisdom gave me 8th grade boys. This was a very tough year, but I was faithful and did what He asked. Anyway, the 8th grade boys graduated, I got a new group who were eager to learn, and I was excited to help this new group learn about God. But God had other plans. He called me to work with 6th graders. By now, I was starting (starting!) to learn to follow His leading. I got quite comfortable serving this group and elementary students, and God told me it was time to move on to Fil-Am. And, as they say, the rest is history.

The point of this is that I followed God’s leading, most of the time kicking and screaming, but followed Him in what He asked me to do. I felt scared some of the time, inadequate most of the time, and had to rely on God all the time. This is where I learned I had to put aside what I wanted, or what I thought I wanted, and follow His leading. Or in other words, I had to die to my wants and desires and submit to Him. And when I did this, I realized like Moses, like Paul, like Timothy, Like Jonah that He gave me more than I ever hoped for. When I died to self, I gained life. When I took up my cross, I found life and my joy became full.

When we take up our cross...when we die to ourselves, our wants, our desires...God does something amazing for us.

As we follow God, remember that not only do we have to follow in faith, but that God has faith in us that we can follow Him and do what He calls us to do.

This brings us to our last point. Remember that all Scripture is written by God through the hands of men. One of the ways God speaks to us is through His Word. I want to read a passage that God has brought to my mind as I think back on the time He has allowed me to serve Him here through Fil-Am. **Romans 16:1-24** is a passage that we often overlook.. It's kinda like filler, like the student assigned to write a 1,000 word essay and can only stretch it out to 900 words. It read from The King James

“I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also. Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ. Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us. Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. Greet Amplias my beloved in the Lord. Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household. Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord. Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord. Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them. Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are

with them. Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you. Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you. I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord. Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

This is like reading 1 Chronicles with all the begats. But if we skipped those, we wouldn't have the book The Prayer of Jabez. There is a message here as well. As I look out at all of you...all of you...I thank God for each and every one of you. Every single person here has helped me grow in my relationship with God in more ways than you can imagine. Like Paul, I thank God for each and every one of you, I salute you and will make mention of you in my prayers daily. I understand now much more than I ever have before, why God led Paul to write those words. I cannot help but remember you in my prayers daily, because you are all my fellow laborers and kinsmen and brethren in Christ Jesus.

Let's pray...