

Sermon
Lanier Christian Church
January 29, 2012

The Joy of Becoming Like Christ

Philippians 2:12-13

Philippians 2:12,13 (NIV)

***12** Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, **13** for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

God is in the life changing business.

He takes a life that is bent and straightens it out. He takes a life that is shattered and puts it back together. He takes a life that is dirty – filthy – and cleans it up. He takes a life that is broken and fixes it. That is what God does.

I have often heard people say, "Jesus changed my life." Has he changed you? For others it is a "Jesus is changing my life...everyday." No matter how you say it... God is in the life change business – have you allowed Him to change your life?

How does Jesus change your life? How does He help you "work out your salvation"? Does He do surgery? Does He brain-wash you? Does He zap you with something and all of a sudden you're changed?

Today there are a lot of opinions on how God changes us.

Some people say, "Just wait on the Lord." This is the "passive approach."

Other people say, "It's up to me – to be more like Christ – therefore I will work at it." This is the "activist viewpoint".

What am I supposed to do in order to grow? Is it all me or is it all up to God? Or perhaps it is a combination of the two.

Paul deals with this very issue in our focal passage of scripture today. When it comes to your spiritual growth, the fact is God has a part and you have a part. Paul uses two phrases to explain this cooperation:

The first phrase is:

"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Philippians 2:12

Note the words – "work out". This is your part. Just like working out at a gym – it takes effort and dedication. It takes effort to maintain a healthy life style – this is true physically as well as spiritually. Let's look at the next phrase:

"...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." - Philippians 2:13

Notice here the words – "works in". This is God's part. God **works in** you to make you more like Jesus.

There are two more words in these verses that I would like us to look at. In verse twelve note the word "your" and in verse thirteen note the word "you". Your salvation is personal – it is about you and it is your salvation. It does not belong to anyone else but you. You have not inherited your salvation. It is not your father's salvation. It has not been handed down to you like property – or a family heirloom. It is yours and yours alone. You cannot blame anyone else – for your salvation. It is your responsibility. You must accept your salvation from Jesus Christ. You and you alone must come to Jesus and accept the sacrifice that He made for you on the cross. Just because your father or mother has been saved – does not mean that you are saved. Just because you live in America does not make you a Christian. Just because one of your relatives may have been a preacher does not make you a Christian. Jesus must be allowed into your heart – by you.

When Paul is talking about working out your salvation "with fear and trembling" – he is not talking about walking around with a fear that you can lose your salvation at any moment. But what Paul is saying

is that you need to take your salvation seriously. Your salvation has eternal implications. Your salvation is a matter of eternal life or eternal death. Your salvation is a life or death issue. You should take it serious. Nothing should be more important in life than your salvation. God wants you saved in order to enter into a relationship with Him – that is the bottom line.

There are three tools God uses to work in to your life to help change you into someone who experiences the joy of becoming like Christ.

I. GOD'S PART IN CHANGING ME

1. God uses CIRCUMSTANCES.

Folks here is a fact: as long as you are alive – you are going to have problems. The book of Job says:

“It’s human! Mortals are born and bred for trouble, as certainly as sparks fly upward.” Job 5:7 (MSG)

Troubles, problems, pressures, headaches, difficulties and stress – welcome to the human race. But for the Christian – for those who are in Christ – God is there to bring good out of bad. Look at what Romans 8:28 says:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Everything that comes into your life – God is big enough to have it work to your good. Please note – not everything that comes into your life is good – but God is able to make bad stuff turn out for your good. There is a divine plan and pattern for everything. God can use all things to – make me more like Jesus.

Let’s think about something for a minute – if God is going to make me like Jesus, then He’s going to take me through some situations that Jesus went through. There were times when Jesus was lonely. There were times when Jesus was tempted. There were times when Jesus was tempted to get depressed. Jesus went through those

things. Do you think He's going to spare you from those things? God is more concerned with your character than your comfort. God is more concerned with your holiness than He is with your happiness. In Hebrews 5:8 the Bible tells us that, "Jesus learned obedience through suffering." How do you think you're going to learn it? In Hebrews chapter 2:10 it says, "Jesus was made perfect through suffering." How do you think you're going to be made perfect...mature?

The second tool God uses to change us is:

2. God uses the BIBLE

The Bible itself tells us how God uses the scripture to change us:

"Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us." 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (MSG)

As we read, study and listen to the Bible – we encounter new thoughts, stories and ideas. But most importantly, We hear God's voice speaking to us and as we listen we are changed. We find words that show us the truth. We find words that expose our sinfulness – our rebellion. We find words that correct our mistakes and bring us forgiveness. We find words that teach and train us in the ways of God.

If you want to get serious about change then you need to get into the Bible. Read it, study it, memorize it, meditate on it and live it – for life change. The more you get the Word of God into your life, the more you're going to be changed.

3. God changes us through the HOLY SPIRIT

If you are a Christian – God Himself has a dwelling inside of you – for the Holy Spirit of God dwells in you.

God – through His power in the Holy Spirit dwelling in you – wants to change you. Romans 8:11 says:

11 *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

The Message Bible says it this way:

“When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With his Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ’s!” Romans 8:11b (MSG)

2 Corinthians 3:18 says:

18 *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

God’s number one purpose in your life is not to make you happy – it is to make you holy – just as Christ was holy. In fact – He is transforming you into the image of His son – Jesus Christ.

When you do wrong things – bad things – do you ever feel guilty about it? Good! You should feel guilty when you sin. You should feel guilty when you disobey God’s word. You should feel guilty when you hurt other people. It is the job of the Holy Spirit to convict you of your sinfulness. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to change you into the image of Jesus. God is in your life to change your life.

But not only that – you have a part in changing your life too.

II. MY PART IN CHANGING ME

1. I can choose what I THINK about

Change is a matter of choice and I can choose what I think about.

Philippians 4:8 tells us:

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

We are to fill our minds with thoughts of good things. Your thoughts don't just direct your life, they are your life. Whatever change you want to make in your life starts with your thoughts. Change always begins with new thinking. The Bible word for change is the word "repentance". In Greek "repentance" means "to change your mind".

When I repent I change my outlook. I begin to think the way God thinks about my behavior. I begin to agree with Him. I agree that I have sinned – broken His rules – missed the mark and have fallen short of His glory. I agree in my mind – that I have sinned. God wants us to change the way we think about things into the way He thinks about things. In Romans 12:2 the Bible says God wants our minds transformed.

2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Notice the word "mind". God wants your mind changed. He wants it transformed. Change your mind and you change your outlook on life. Change your mind and your behavior changes. Choose what you think about if you want to change your life.

Here is the second thing I can do to experience the joy of becoming more like Jesus:

2. I can choose to DEPEND on God

A branch is totally dependent upon the vine. When it is cut off from that vine, it won't survive – it won't bear fruit. A branch cannot produce fruit by itself. It's got to be connected. Jesus gave a beautiful illustration of this in John 15:4,5 when He said:

4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

To have real life change you need to be connected to the One who gives life. You see – fruit comes from being connected – it is an inside job. Fruit is dependent on the nourishment of the source. It comes from the vine.

How do you know when you're depending on God? Let me ask you – how much of your life do you think you have under control? Is it under your control – or have you placed it under God's control? Here is an easy test: Check your prayer life. Whatever you pray about you're depending on God for. Whatever you don't pray about you're not depending on God for.

Your decisions, your feelings, your relationships, your deadlines, your purchases, your priorities – God is concerned about all of them. Are you dependent on God for them? He cares about them – because He cares about you. Depend on God in all things.

3. I can choose how I respond to CIRCUMSTANCES

Situations and circumstances are a part of life. You will find yourself in good situations and bad situations – but how you respond to them is up to you.

There is a parallel between God's resources and your choice. God has the resource of His Word; you're supposed to read it. God has the Holy Spirit; you choose to depend on Him. God uses circumstances; you choose your response to the circumstances. James 1:2-4 tells us:

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops

perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

All of your trials. All of your testing. All of your circumstances and situations serve a purpose. They are to help you become more like Christ.

You have been born again and you've got to grow, develop, work out the salvation you've been given. You are not working "for" your salvation – that was accomplished on the cross. But you are to work out your salvation in your own life. You help develop it. You help develop Christian character. You help by becoming more patient. You help by becoming more kind – more loving. The more you use your muscles the more you develop your muscles. This is a process that produces mature character. That's God's goal for you to have Christ like character in your life.

You cannot choose what is going to happen to you next week, next month, next year. You don't have that choice. But you can choose how you're going to respond – how you're going to react. Are you going to respond in a way that is pleasing to God? Are you going to let situations make you or break you? Are you going to become bitter or better? You have a choice of how you respond to your trials.

Romans 5:3-4 tells us:

3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.

God is more concerned with your character than He is with your comfort. Christ like character is the bottom line. It is the ultimate goal. God is very concerned at how you respond to your situations and circumstances.

From the moment that I accepted Jesus – something changed. Today something is changing. Tomorrow something will be changed. God is in the life change business and I can be involved in it with Him. I can partnership with God in the process of changing my life. Let me illustrate what I am talking about:

Let's say there is a river that runs right by your house. It is wide and the water flows slow and steady. All the water is flowing to the ocean. It has a definite course and a definite destination in mind. There is a little rowboat on the bank of the river and you decide to get in the rowboat and paddle out into the middle of the river. Now once you get in the boat you can do one of three things. You can:

1. Paddle against the current.
2. Sit in the rowboat and go with the flow.
3. Paddle with the current.

Which one of the three options will get you to the ocean sooner?

God has a plan and a purpose for you in mind. He has a destination that He wants to take you to. He wants to change you into the image of His son – Jesus Christ. He wants you to experience the joy of becoming like Christ. But, You have a choice. You can fight against the process – you can sit back and do nothing – or you can work together with Him in the process of becoming more Godly – of becoming more like Jesus. What will you do?

Tom Shepard, Rick Warren, David Simpson