



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

PHILIPPIANS 2

February 2021

OPEN THE PACKAGE

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus... (Philippians 2:1-5 NRSV)

The Christmas trees had many packages piled underneath for days before the big day. Now the floor is empty except for a few gifts left for family or friends who haven't gotten theirs yet. Wouldn't it be a shame if we left the big one with our name on it unopened - admired and anticipated, but left untouched? What if it contained the last will and testament of a rich uncle who left enough money to pay all of our obligations and secure our financial

future, and we just left it there while continuing to live under the daily stress of crushing debt? Sadly, this is happening with the biggest gift ever given. Salvation is a big package and includes benefits most have never even conceived. Unopened, it neither blesses the Giver nor the receiver. This is what the Apostle Paul is addressing in Philippians 2:1-13. He says that if something is in the package, open and use it.

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“IF THERE IS any encouragement in Christ...” (Philippians 2:1 NRSV). Well, is there? Jesus promised His disciples that after His departure they would be encouraged by the coming of the Holy Spirit. He would make real in their consciousness the vitality of sharing life with the Father, Son, and Spirit. He makes access to the Father real. Followers of Jesus can pray directly to the Father using His name. He makes truth known to them. He guides them in daily decisions. He makes the presence of Jesus real to them in suffering and persecution. He guarantees that they will finally receive the final installment on the promise of eternal life (see John 14-17).

“...any consolation from love...” (Philippians 2:1 NRSV). Well? Jesus declared to His disciples that since He was the true vine and they were branches, they shared the very life that empowered Him. He said that the key was remaining in the love of the Father. Since Jesus relied totally on being loved unconditionally by the Father, He loved His disciples like that. When disciples are conscious of being loved by the Father through Jesus, they can love others in the

same way. This kind of intimate love produces trust and thereby makes obedience normal.

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15:10 NRSV).

“...any sharing in the Spirit...” (Philippians 2:1 NRSV). Well? Jesus was clear that the Comforter would come and continue to teach, protect, and empower those who trust in Jesus. He is the one who opens eyes to see the invisible world that makes sense of what is really going on. He who raised Jesus from the dead lives in the believer to quicken a new way of living. By the Spirit, humans can again embrace the original design for humanity. We can partner with God in managing His creation. He assures us that we are never alone and never without hope. After all, He is the Spirit of life. Death is no threat (see John 16).

“...any compassion and sympathy...” (Philippians 2:1 NRSV). Well? Hebrews 4:14-16 declares that Jesus is now our high priest, interceding for us as

we walk out this salvation we are given. He has not only faced every temptation and test that we face, He still sympathizes with us as we face our neediness and failures. He has made the final sacrifice and is never surprised at the depth of our need. In fact, He is eager for us to open another aspect of the package by coming to the throne of grace to find help. The only qualification we must have to approach is an acknowledged need.

As the Apostle Paul is watching these believers in Philippi unwrap their salvation gift, he rejoices when they use it. (So does Jesus.) The process of working out salvation that Paul laid out for the Philippians is the same for us. First, we are made aware of our needs. We realize that He is eager to supply what we require. So, we ask Him for what we need, fully expecting Him to enable us to move forward in partnership with Him. Then, we act in trusting obedience. It is an amazing salvation: He makes us aware of our need for the gift, He gives the gift, He works in us to choose and act to please Him, then He applauds us for our efforts!

“Therefore, my beloved, just as you

have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure”
(Philippians 2:12-13 NRSV).

Paul reminds the believers in Philippi that it is the very life of Jesus that they have been given, and through His earthly life He showed them what that life looks like when lived out:

“Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness, And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even the death on a cross”
(Philippians 2:5-8 NRSV).

When we unwrap the gift and use it, we will have the opportunity to refuse to demand our own rights with each other. We will confront situations where we accept the limitations that love requires, putting others' interests above our

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own. We may even choose to suffer for the extension of the shared mission. This attitude, when lived out, produces a society of people unified in Spirit, concerned about the mind of Christ rather than personal opinions, and shining as lights in a dark world. It is so supernatural that many have considered it beyond our reach, and it is! But He stooped to our level to live as us so that we could live as He does. It is a life far beyond the moralistic efforts to implement principles, apply propositions, or enforce random promises. We are sharing the very life of Christ. We know Him and love Him, so we trust Him and obey Him.

Jesus has been exalted to the highest possible glory. Though still the Son of Man, He is and will be worshipped and obeyed by all creatures, either now or in eternity:

“Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”
(Philippians 2:9-11 NRSV).

We, too, find our glory in sharing with His suffering on earth and in sharing in His rule in the heavens. We again enjoy what it means to be humans rightly related to God and creation. We don't become more than human, but more human. We can get on with the task of managing His creation as we enjoy His presence and pleasure. The salvation He gives is a big package. It contains everything we need to be fully human and fully satisfied. What a shame to leave such a gift untouched. Before you put away the Christmas tree, make sure the big package is not left unopened. Open it and 2021 will be a better year—guaranteed.



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