

Pressing Down to Press Up

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[0 : 00] Amen. Please do keep open that passage in front of you. So I should have said, if we haven't met before, my name is Kieran. It was mentioned in the prayers. I serve as the pastor of Grace Church Montrose.

And what I regularly, not every week, but regularly say at the beginning of our services, I welcome people in. I say, grace is our name and grace is our message.

It's a reminder to us that at the very heart of who we are as God's people is the grace of God that we find in Jesus.

You see, I think for many of us, our natural tendency is to distort and to misunderstand what God's grace is. We can get drawn into thinking that what God has done by forgiving us our sins is he has given us a blank slate.

He's given us a reset and it's, right, here's a second chance. Now go off and do as well as you can and see if this time you don't mess up. So we think, isn't it wonderful that God has forgiven us, but now it's all on my back.

[1 : 08] Now it's time for me to take this on. And now I know what I did wrong last time, so I'm going to do my very best. Or we think of ourselves, maybe we've got a slightly better idea and we think this, God has given us this grace.

But there's a limit, there's an amount that we get. And there's, we've just sinned and maybe we're using it up and we're right at the very last little bit. And so often our hearts are kind of fearful about where do we stand before God.

And we can hear messages that call into question the very nature of the grace of God. But here's the good news.

This is the thing for us to remember is God's grace is unlimited, eternal. It is greater than all of our sin. It overflows to abundance for all of us.

The Christian life is not just beginning by grace, but goes along in grace all the way to the very end. God's grace is always with us.

[2 : 09] You see, here's the thing, and I think this is really important for us, and it's something that we see throughout Philippians. You see, God's grace found us at the bottom. You see, everything in our world tells us that to be successful, we have to climb the ladder to the very top.

And so what we think is to stay in God's good graces, we need to get to the very top of the ladder. But what Paul is doing for us, as he wrote this letter to the church in Philippi, this is what God's word is saying to us, is God's grace keeps coming to us when we are down low.

So, those people who recognize they need God's grace, and remember that God's grace comes to us in the humble servant, the humble saviour Jesus, the one who left the riches and glories of heaven to come down to us.

You see, what Paul is doing, and here's the message for us tonight, is saying, grace is what we need, grace is what we are called to hold on to. And let's keep walking forward in God's grace, not in our own strength, but solely in him.

And this evening, I've got two points. The points are on the order of service that you got. I think they're going to be up on the screen as well. There's two points for those who are note-takers. And the first one is this, what we're looking at in verses 1 to 11.

[3 : 37] Watch out, something smells fishy. Fishy. That was meant to say fleshy. My apologies on that one. Sorry, I sent that wrong to you. That's my fault. Watch out.

Making loads of mistakes tonight, aren't we, here? But watch out, something smells fleshy. But it's helpful, actually, because this phrase here, something smells fishy.

That phrase, I did a bit of Googling on this, something smells fishy. You see, where that phrase came from is sometime in the 19th century. And in the markets, you see, there was this view that fish didn't smell.

Now, as someone who doesn't like seafood, I can tell you fish really does smell. But for those who were selling fish regularly, who have probably grown inoculated to the smell of fish, when they could smell the fish, they knew something was going wrong.

They knew that there was something rotten amongst what they were going to be selling. And that's what they meant to say when something smells fishy. And what I'm saying here, and what Paul is doing for us tonight, is saying that there are some people who are coming into the church, and the message they're bringing, the gospel that they're bringing to the church, something smells fleshy about us.

[4 : 56] Something smells off. Something smells fishy, we might say. Have a look with me at verse 2.

We get this here. Three people. Watch out for those dogs. Watch out for those evildoers. Watch out for those mutilators of the flesh.

And now what Paul is saying here is there's these people coming into the church, and they're trying to subvert the grace of God. They're trying to distort this, to win people to something else, which causes people, calls people away from Jesus and his grace to us.

And what Paul is doing here, when he uses these words, for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh, this isn't Paul, like, throwing out insults.

Actually, Paul is doing something here. He's actually trying to subvert the claims of these people who are coming in. In all likelihood, this is a group called the Judaizers, that Paul talks about in another letter, the letter to the Galatians.

[6 : 06] The Judaizers were coming in and saying that, yes, grace is the way into the church, but it is not everything. We actually need something on top of that.

We need to obey the old law of Moses, that people need to be circumcised. People need to follow the old ways. And you see what Paul is saying here, is he's saying to these Jewish people, saying to these Judaizers, you've got it all wrong.

In fact, you are the very problem that you are calling against. By calling them dogs, dogs was the language that the Judaizers, that's what they would call the Gentiles, those who were not from Jewish background.

They were called Gentiles dogs. When he says that they're evildoers, here they're coming in saying, we are leading you in the good way, but he's saying you are leading people down to evil.

And he says that they are mutilators of the flesh, that they are causing damage. You see, what he says instead is, the church, those people who have put their trust in Jesus, those people who have collapsed upon the grace of God, saying that we can bring nothing to him, that our trust is solely in Christ, they are the true circumcision.

[7 : 27] You see, circumcision in the Old Testament was only ever a picture, a sign that was to point people towards the true circumcision, which would be a circumcision of the heart. And the circumcision of the heart happens solely when people believe in Jesus and God, by his spirit, circumcises the heart, making people his very own.

He's saying, in the new covenant, it is nothing to do with what we bring with our flesh. You see, the issue that Paul is dealing with here is what I think people are very helpfully called, it's a gospel plus. It is the gospel plus doing this as well. And this is so dangerous. And what Paul does here is Paul shines a spotlight on himself for a moment so that we take our eyes off ourselves and look to the true foundation for our hope and for our salvation.

You see, Paul, what he does here is he points to his own pedigree and his own performance. Have a look at me what he says in the second half of verse four.

If someone else thinks they have reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more, circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law, a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for righteousness, based on the law, faultless.

[9 : 10] You see, what Paul does here is he points to his pedigree and his performance. He points towards his ethnicity and his ethics. He says, first of all, look at my background.

I've got the perfect background. You might think of it in these terms. Someone who turns up here on a Sunday and say, well, I was born in the Western Isles, baptised by Reverend MacDonald. It could have been anyone. There's so many of them. I'm baptised by Reverend MacDonald. Went to free church camps. Met my wife at the free church youth conference. I've been going to free churches across the land and saying, look at my background.

I'm the perfect one here. But not just that. Look at my performance. So often we think, we say, well, you know, I'm the one who went to Sunday school. I put up my hands, gave all the right answers at the right time.

I'm the one who helps and serves out at the local charity. I do this. I do that. And what Paul's saying is he's speaking to these Judaisers and say, my background is better than yours.

[10:21] My conduct is better than yours. And it counts for absolutely nothing. I was reading a book last year about a guy called Captain Dosti.

He was a captain in the Albanian army. And in Albania, every single citizen, and this was back in the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, every single Albanian citizen had a biography.

It was kept by the government. And the cleaner the biography, the better the chance you had in progressing in life. People were fearful that anything they did, anything they were spotted, would stain or bring a blot to their biography.

And he was very proud that he kept this clean biography. He was, one of his jobs was he was to listen into the radio to his job in the army was to listen to the radio to try catch, to hear any news or anything going on where people were trying to threaten the security of Albania.

And one night, he turned on the radio, he was flicking around, and he heard a Christian radio program. Now, Albania was the world's first ever atheist country.

[11:40] And to be seen to showing interest in religion, in Christianity, that's the kind of thing that would bring a blot to your biography.

And so he was deeply fearful and would lock the doors when he would listen to us. He would close the curtains. He would make sure no one was around and turn it on at the right time each evening so he could listen.

That deep fearfulness of blotting the biography. And that's the kind of thing that Paul is dealing with here. Those people who their main concern is, how do they look outwards to others?

How do we look towards God? Jesus, you know, Jesus' story of the prodigal son. There are many of us who ran and ran as far away from God as we possibly could.

But part, and actually maybe the key point of that parable that Jesus told, was the older brother who was just as far away from God. But he managed to keep God far away by trying to hide their issues behind their pedigree and their performance.

[12:56] But what Paul has realized at the very heart of the gospel is that all of that, all of this is a loss in comparison to knowing Christ.

He calls it garbage. Rubbish. You see here, he says, I count it all as loss that I may gain Christ.

You see that there at the end of verse 8. You see, maybe think of it in these terms. This is gospel. This is gospel maths. Everything minus Jesus equals nothing.

Everything minus Jesus equals nothing. Jesus plus nothing equals everything. You see, the problem with what these people were coming in was that they were saying it's Jesus plus this.

But by adding to what Jesus does, you only end up taking away from what he has achieved for us. But you see, here is the good news that it's nothing that we bring to God, but it's what he does for us.

[14:10] And all we are called to do is to hold out our hands open and empty. Because you see, this is what Paul says. He talks about, verse 9, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.

The righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. Here he's talking about righteousness. It's the same word for justification.

One of those shun words that you hear maybe regularly at church, but maybe sometimes you think, I'm not entirely sure what that actually means. Is that a very helpful way of remembering? What does it mean to be justified?

To be justified means to say, it's just as if I had never sinned. But it's actually, it's more than that. It's richer than that. It's actually saying, it's just as if I'd lived Jesus' life.

You see, here's the good news. All those who come before Jesus and say, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling. All those who come before him and say, I'm looking for your righteousness alone.

[15 : 20] I bring nothing to the table and I receive solely by faith. I know that I am empty. I know that I am lost.

And it is you that gives me everything that I need. You see what he says here in verse 10. Paul says, I want to know Christ.

Yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection of the dead.

And the language there that he uses to the participation in his sufferings, it's very similar language to what we saw back in chapter 2. Chapter 2, that wonderful hymn in verses 6-11 about Jesus, where we see this, Jesus, who being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. You see, Jesus went right down to the point of he emptied himself in love.

[16 : 43] And it is those who know their emptiness are the ones who are filled by all of Jesus' righteousness that he gives to us. All those who follow in the lowly path of Jesus, receiving the grace of God solely by faith.

And so what Paul then is wanting to say to the church in Philippi is he saying, shun the way of flesh. Shun the way of flesh.

Know that when you come to church every Sunday, know that when you come before him in prayer, know that when you go into your week, that God does not judge you on the quality of what your morning devotions look like.

God does not judge you on how loudly or how well you sung in the morning or in the evening. You see, God's love and God's grace are based solely in Jesus, not in us.

It is those who take Jesus by faith and say, he alone is my righteousness. It is nothing to do with anything that's in me, solely what is in him.

[18 : 12] Captain Dusty, who I mentioned to you a little bit earlier on, that Albanian army captain, he was writing, he ended up starting to write letters to this Christian group who were putting out the radio and one of his friends found this correspondence and one of his friends, this friend then said to him, you better be careful, people are watching you, this could be dangerous for your biography and he responded, well I hope that they are because I hope that they find God because you see, what he had realised is that knowing Jesus is greater than anything that the world can offer, knowing Jesus is greater than receiving all of the world's plaudits, all of the world's celebration, knowing Jesus is greater because knowing Jesus means that we can know God in his fullness and this is what Paul wants us to take for ourselves, to own for ourselves, saying we come with empty hands taking the lowly path of Jesus.

Because you see what Paul is saying here is he's saying watch out, something smells fleshy about these people are coming, but he also says this in our second point this evening, watch them, something smells heavenly, watch them, something smells heavenly.

Have a look at me at verses 15 to 17, I think they're the key parts of this second part of the passage. And I'll read it again for us. All of us then who are mature should take such a view of things.

And if on some points you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.

At the end of chapter 2, what we saw way back in the summer, is Paul pointed to the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus.

[20 : 38] He showed their self-sacrificial service to the church. And what he said to the church in Philippi, he said, honour people like this.

These people who give themselves, who empty themselves like Jesus, they should be honoured.

And what he's saying this time is that they should be followed, that they should be imitated and emulated, that we should follow them, that we should take up their mindset.

And again, have a look at me back in chapter 2, chapter 2, verse 5, and it says this, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

That same language is used in 3, verse 15. All of us then who are mature should take such a view of things, or we might say have the same mindset of things, like Paul, like Timothy, like Epaphroditus, who serve not trying to earn God's favour, but living in God's grace. And so Paul points to his own positive example. That's what he pointed to just before these verses in 12 to 14. And when we were reading 12 to 14, I don't know if you noticed that it's kind of bracketed there.

[22 : 03] Verse 12, but I press on to take hold of that. Verse 14, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

And here we see the total transformation in Paul's life. Because that language there to press on, to press on, to press into the grace of God, to press into Christ, is actually the same language used in 3 verse 6 where he says this, as for zeal, persecuting the church.

That is, pressing after the church, trying to bring them great affliction. And here we see the total transformation in the life of Paul, where once he was opposed to the grace of God known in the gospel, where he is opposed to God's people who put their trust in Jesus.

Here now, instead of chasing after these people, he is chasing after Jesus. And this is an important thing for us.

You see, when we become Christians, God doesn't cancel our desires, he doesn't cancel our love, he doesn't cancel our zeal.

[23 : 30] Instead, he redirects them towards his purposes, and he redirects our hearts towards the only one who can satisfy our hearts, the longing of our souls.

He changes and transforms us. You see, the issue before we knew Jesus, the heart of sin is what theologians of old called disordered loves, where our love was set on that which could never truly satisfy.

And you see, in the gospel, what God has done by his spirit in circumcising our hearts, which we thought about earlier on, is he has shifted our focus to see Jesus and to know that he and he alone can fill the heart, can fulfill that longing.

And what Paul is saying here is now what he is pressing on towards is he's pressing on the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

But then, have a look with me back at verse 10 again. Paul says, I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

[24 : 54] Now, how can we say here, Paul says, I want to know the heavenward call of Jesus, but I also want to know his sufferings.

I also want to know his death. How can Paul bring these two things together? This heavenward upward call and this downward death of Jesus. One of the things that I said in the summer was this. You'll all know the phrase, what goes up must come down. Here's the thing about the kingdom of God. Here's the thing about the gospel.

It's what and who goes down are those who are lifted up. Those who press downwards are those who are lifted up.

That's what we see in Jesus. Jesus, who was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. He went down from the glories of heaven all the way to earth and down below the earth into the grave.

[26 : 00] Yet, 2 verse 9, therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name. You see, this is the shape of the Christian life.

The way to heaven is by the way of the grave. I wonder if you've grasped this truth, that it is taking on the emptiness of Jesus, the self-sacrificial ways of Jesus, into which we are lifted up into the heavenly places, in which our hope of heaven is secured.

We talked about it last time, it's what one theologian called the J-curve. It's more like a U, but J, you know, because of Jesus. In the sense that the way that Jesus took was down and then was lifted up, and is into this in which we are called, to press down, to follow in the ways of Jesus, so that we might be lifted up with him.

And so what Paul is saying is let us then think this way, to take such a view just like he and others have. Our joy, our treasure, is stolen when we accept the lie of a pain-free life.

Our joy and our treasure is stolen when we take on the view of life that there is no suffering, there is no hardship.

[27 : 42] You see, what Paul is saying is self-sacrificial love, giving ourselves in service to others, is the way that we follow Jesus. It is not by giving in to the way of the flesh, but it is following the way of faith, following in the way of Jesus.

Paul points to the negative example of the enemies of the cross in verses 18 to 19. He says, For as I have often told you before, and now tell you again, even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross.

Their destiny is destruction, their God is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. Those who are enemies of the cross are those who set their minds, set their hearts, set their affections on the things of the world, rather than setting their things on the things, setting their minds, setting their loves on the things that are of heaven.

The cross puts to death our fleshly desires. The cross puts to death the world as it is.

But here we are offered something better, something greater than the world can ever offer. And we see this in verses 20 to 21. The promise here is held out of bodily renewal.

[29 : 23] See here, but our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Those who stay focused on the world will not receive heaven's remedy. But here, Paul is calling us back to the gospel, back to the grace that we find in Jesus.

So often when I'd read this before, when I saw this, when he transforms our lowly bodies, that they will be like his glorious body. So quickly, I read lowly as earthly, and I read glorious as heavenly.

I thought that it was that he, all those who have bodies that are racked and decayed by the sin and diseases and the death of this world, they will be transformed.

But actually, the word he uses here for lowly is the word that he's used numerous times throughout this letter for humble. You see, what Paul is saying here, and it's the promise for those who know that their bodies are decaying, know that their bodies are struggling, but actually here, what Paul is saying is it's those who take the lowly path, those who follow in the humble way of Jesus.

[31 : 00] They are the ones, we are the ones, whose lives will be transformed, whose bodies will be made glorious like his.

You see, here we're following that same pattern of that song in chapter two, that all those who follow in the way of Jesus, who press downwards, will be lifted up in their bodies' glorifies.

We will be joined to him by faith, united to him. John Adam was part of a group that's become known as the St.

Andrews Seven. They were a group of students who studied at St. Andrews in the 1820s, if I remember correctly. Each of them had wonderful futures ahead of them.

Went to one of the better universities at the time were students there. But they were known as St. Andrews Seven because each of them committed not to follow in the successful ways of the world, but to give themselves, to go off into mission to places where Jesus wasn't known, where the gospel wasn't being proclaimed.

[32 : 17] And John Adam said this, he said, if it be but for the name of Jesus, all shall be well. And I am persuaded that on the deathbed, it will cost us not one regret to have forsaken all for Christ.

You see, he, like Paul, had seen that knowing Christ means everything in the world is garbage compared to us. All the success that is offered before us means nothing compared to taking the lowly path following in the way of Jesus.

And so what Paul then says as he finishes off this section, verse 4, therefore my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, when you're hearing all these messages, when something smells a bit fleshy and fishy, he's saying stand firm, in the Lord.

You see, our hope is solely in him. You see, we will only know God as we press into Jesus, as we know that we have nothing to give, nothing to earn God's love, but it is offered to us freely.

Here he's saying to us, stand firm in him, once more collapse son, his grace, knowing that he is good, and his grace is greater than anything the world offers, greater than anything we can achieve on our own, and is freely available, not just once, but always and forever more.

[34 : 06] Let's pray together. Amen. Amen.

So often, and Father, in our hearts, we want to take control. When we hear promises that if we take particular actions, we will be safe, we want to cling on to them. But as we are reminded again tonight, your grace cannot be earned, but it is freely given and received solely and wholly by faith.

And so, Heavenly Father, we pray this evening, would you hold before us your grace once more, the grace that transforms lives, the grace that lifts us up heavenward, your grace that brings us into your presence. And God, our Father, we pray that you will hold before us these wonderful examples of lives that are lived by grace, not by the flesh. In those moments when we fear that we have fallen short, in those moments when the lies of the enemy would take our eyes off of you. By your grace, by your spirit, help us to fix our eyes on Jesus, to take the lowly path to follow him into suffering, into emptiness, into self-sacrificial service for others. We know in our hearts of hearts we fall short every day. Lord, we also know that your grace is more than sufficient. It is overflowing and abundant. So fill our hearts once again, we pray. And help us to lift our eyes heavenward, to look to you, knowing that your promise is sure and certain, holding on to it day by day, as we walk in the ways of your humble servant Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.