

Text: Phil. 1:6

Title: "How good is God's good work in us?"

Time: 4/18/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: This past week was an unusual workweek for me. Last Sunday afternoon I flew down to South Carolina because I had received a call from my sister the week before explaining that Dad was having some trouble recovering from pneumonia. He needed someone to be with him for a third week after my brother and then my sister had been there for two already.

There is always work to do at Dad's that he is not able to do himself. He lives in a part of South Carolina that used to be cotton fields, and when the cotton industry tanked, the fields were replanted with pine trees, so every year a thick coat of green pollen descends on everything, including Dad's outside screened-in porch. So, I had to do some work to get that porch cleaned up for Dad. That is where he likes to sit and pray for us here in the morning, so it was a big priority for me to make Dad's porch operational again.

This last week was a bit unusual because our house down there has some new tenants, and they asked that a much-needed paint job be done as they move in. We first got some quotes that I could not afford, but then I figured out that I was going to have to do this paint job myself. I spent a long day on Wednesday painting this house. I woke up late on Thursday hoping to have a text message from the wife of the couple moving in telling me that I had done good work and that she was happy with the result.

I checked my phone, but I saw nothing. I did not have the courage to text her to see if she liked the work I had done,

and then finally two hours later I was greatly relieved to finally get the message from her that she was delighted with the work I had done. Not every job I do is a job well done, but it was nice to know that this one passed that test.

We worship our Lord together this morning Who is a God of wondrous works that are always perfectly done. My study of Scripture has led me to conclude that I can organize my understanding of the works of God with five categories: God's work of creation, of providence, of revelation, of salvation, and of judgment. All these works are good.

Our text this morning speaks of one of those works that God accomplishes in the heart and life of the believer, what Paul calls "a good work in you." That is God's work of salvation. It is as though Paul is sending a message to the Philippians, not to say that their work is a job well done, but rather that God's work in them is an ongoing job well done. I want us to think about that good work, that job well done, that is happening in us as fellow-believers this morning, in answer to the question, "How good is God's good work in us?" I will mention three things from the verse.

I. God's good work in us has a good beginning (v. 6, "He which hath begun a good work).

Illustration: Any paint job must begin well in order to go well. When I arrived at the house on Wednesday, I saw that a lot of work had to be done before that first can of paint could be opened. Furniture had to be moved away from the walls and covered, filled holes had to be sanded, curtain rods and outlet plates had to be removed, certain areas needed to be cleaned. I was there making preparations for two hours before ever cracking that first paint can. A good paint job must have a good beginning.

Application: Paul reflects on the beginning of the good work of salvation that God had accomplished in the lives of these Philippian believers. We read of that beginning in Acts 16:9-40.

Did you notice that as this work in Philippi begins, it does so because the Lord does some things that no man can do, but He does so using men. I notice three miracles in the good beginning of this good work especially.

1. The Lord miraculously sent someone with the gospel (vv. 9-10).

Paul's vision teaches us that seeing the need is an important key here. The Lord Jesus spoke about the need for laborers in the harvest field and the importance of seeing this need of the world around us for the gospel: "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, for they are white already for harvest" (John 4:35).

When you and I see that lost family member or neighbor, can we hear him say, "Come help us"? Do we really see the spiritual need that stands there before us? Clearly, when Paul went to the banks of the Philippian river with the gospel, no one came running up to him crying out, "Help me!" But the Lord still wanted Paul to hear that from them.

This good work needs a good beginning, and the Lord miraculously saved you and I, as He did the Apostle Paul, to remove our eyes from a life of self-service and pleasure to a life of seeing and meeting the need of people all around us for the gospel. We must hear their "Come help us," even though it seems that they are perfectly content without our help.

2. The Lord miraculously opened Lydia's heart (vv. 14-15).

The Bible tells us that the natural man does not receive the things of the spirit of God, that they are foolishness to him, because these things are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14). The Holy Spirit must give an understanding, which is His work of illumination. Without that work, Paul's preaching would have been foolishness to Lydia, just as it was to Agrippa later on, who scorned Paul sarcastically for "almost convinc[ing]" him to become a Christian (Acts 26:28).

But did you notice that God's gift of illumination to Lydia, His opening of her heart, was so that she could understand the things spoken by Paul? Paul's speaking, elsewhere called preaching (Rom. 10:14), was an essential part of this work. It is the Word of God that is living and powerful and used of God's Spirit to change the minds of people, from thinking that the things of God are foolishness to seeing that they are our only hope of salvation from sin.

Has the Lord miraculously opened your heart to hear His word this way? Without that, no one can be saved.

3. The Lord miraculously delivered from Satanic opposition (vv. 16-18, 22-26).

The work in Philippi teaches us that circumstances can often get harder, not easier, when God is beginning His good work in a heart or place. Satan does not want that work to get started. He knows that he must eliminate it at the beginning, or he will never be able to stop it. And so we read of the wearying success of this demon and the beatings endured by Paul and Silas. Things would have been much easier for them if they were content to live without this good work ever beginning.

But even in the face of this kind of opposition, Paul and Silas have a more powerful resource. Prayer was an important key here (v. 25). And so when Satan tries to attack with a demon, Paul's prayer winds up saving the slave girl it possessed and ruining the divination business of her masters. And when Satan tries to attack with beatings and jailing, their prayer is answered with an earthquake and the salvation of the jailer and his entire household who believe.

Illustration: The Lord's battles in His work of salvation with Satan often remind me of the three-point play in basketball. Satan breaks all the rules and commits the foul, but the basket goes in anyway and additional benefits accrue to the Divine Shooter's glory. He gets more points out of the opposition of the rule breaker.

Clearly, God's work in the life of the believer is a good work because it has a good beginning. Let's not forget the miraculous day we became believers, how the Lord opened our heart to believe the things spoken by the one He had sent to give us the gospel, and how Satan's opposition only redounded to the glory of His work of salvation in us.

II. God's good work in us has a good ending (v. 6, "until the day of Christ").

Illustration: One of the wonderful things about doing a painting job is that at the end of the job, you can see the fruits of your labor in the transformation of the place you are painting. The house I painted on Wednesday went from a scuffed up and dirty yellow and green to a fresh and bright shade of gray that transformed the way everything looked.

Application: The apostle Paul remembered that someday he was going to be able to see the end results, the fruit of

God's good work, in the lives of these believers. That day he calls *the day of Christ*. The Bible's way to describe the future is the phrase *the day of Christ*. Biblically speaking, everyone's future is the day of Christ. The question is not, "What will be my future?" The question is, "Are we ready for that future, the day of Christ?"

Those who have experienced God's good work of saving grace like these Philippian believers will be completely transformed into the fruits of that work on that day, what the Bible calls glorification (Rom. 8:30).

One of the best descriptions of glorified believers in the Bible is found in Rev. 7:9-17, a passage that I believe describes one of the results of the rapture of the church. That is our hope. That is the good future day this good work has in store for all those who believe the gospel of Christ.

But we can look around at ourselves this morning and tell immediately that we are not yet there, right? The good work has not yet ended. Our gathering this morning does not look very much like the gathering in Revelation 7. We are not hard to number. We do our best to sing God's praise, but we can tell these Revelation 7 saints do better. The robes of our lives do not always look perfectly white and clean from our perspective. We still hunger, and thirst, and get sunburn. Not yet is every tear wiped from our eyes.

The Philippian believers of 1:6 were like us, not yet like the Revelation 7 gathering. Still, Paul mentions this future day of Christ to them, because it is this future that gives today's local church hope, and not only hope, but also a goal. This good work of God's salvation is slowly and progressively making our gathering more and more like Revelation 7, which is what we will be someday.

This goal defines what Jesus's local churches are supposed to be working toward. Paul is explicit about our need to focus on this future goal in Eph. 4:11-16.

III. God's work in us can be trusted with a good confidence (v. 6, "Being confident of this very thing").

Illustration: Golf is one of those games that can shake a player's confidence. Gospel ministry in the local church can be like that sometimes. One time I asked a pastor friend how things were going at his church, and he said that it seemed kind of like his golf game. He can have a great front nine holes and then see everything fall apart on the back nine.

But then he said that in spite of this undeniable truth about how things were going at church, he claimed the promise of this verse. He explained to me that he was confident that the Craftsman who began the good work would finish the good work. He would finish what He had started, and when complete there would be no spot, wrinkle, defect, or deficiency. That was an encouraging truth to me as both a pastor and as a Christian struggling to grow in the Lord.

Application: How could Paul say that he was so confident? He could say that only because he knew that this work of salvation was God's good work in us, not our good work in God.

Can you imagine how this verse might have read if God's work of salvation depended on our good work in God? Maybe we would read something like this: "Knowing that the odds are really stacked against any hope of success, I pessimistically wish that you would somehow do better and better and quit doing so poorly so that we can at least

make some small progress towards earning the day of Christ someday.” Praise the Lord, that is not how the verse reads, because our salvation is not our work in God, but God’s work in us. We too can be confident, even when our failure to work is evident. He will finish what He has started in us. He does His work perfectly.

Conclusion: Will He do so for you? Has the work begun in you? Would Paul be confident, that He who began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ? Perhaps the Lord would open your heart like Lydia’s this morning, and you would see like never before the enormity of your sin and need for help. I would hear your “Come help me” if that is you. And I would tell you that Jesus is your help. He died in your place to save you from your sins, and He rose again to give you freely eternal life by His grace. Will you believe and receive that gift. Will you believe that this good work has begun in you this morning?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*