

Defined by Jesus

Philippians 1:1-2

With Hurricane Irma descending on Florida it is fitting for us to gather together as God's people to worship His name, cry out to Him for mercy and reflect on His Word. Disasters like we just saw in Houston and unstoppable storms like this one inevitably raise questions for us and our neighbors.

- Where is God in all of this?
- How can God be all-powerful and all-loving and still allow this kind of suffering?
- Even if we sort of understand that it's all for God's glory and our good, how do we explain this to other people who are struggling to believe in a good God?

As we walk through Philippians this fall we will find answers to all of these questions and more. But for tonight, to keep it simple, I just want to look at the first two verses of this encouraging book. In other circumstances I would have just run past this introductory section, but tonight gives us a chance to pause over them and see the beauty and wisdom of how Paul begins this letter.

We'll see three important qualities of a follower of Jesus: we are directed by Jesus, defined by Jesus and dependent on Jesus. Directed, defined and dependent.

***"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi,
with the overseers and deacons:
Grace to you and peace
from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."***

Philippians 1:1-2

First of all, let's keep in mind that **we are Directed by Jesus**. Even that word is not strong enough. Paul sees himself as a servant of Christ Jesus. The word there in verse one is actually "bondslave." The picture is not of a Downton Abby style household servant, nor is it of a Middle Passage African slave trade. The Lord is not an abusive slaveholder we belong to. He is a loving King. And we are his bondservants.

Let's keep this relationship in mind as we face natural disasters like Irma and other struggles and losses in our lives. Pastor Colin Smith, from the church we just came from in Chicago, has a helpful line in his book Momentum. ***"God does not owe you, He owns you."***

Do you hear that? "God does not owe you, He owns you." What a difference one letter makes. How often do we think that God sure does owe us. Look at all we've done for him!

It is that very sense of entitlement that makes suffering so difficult for people. The question "Why do bad things happen to good people?" makes the enormous assumption that there is such a thing as a good person. The Bible flatly denies that and says instead, "There is no one righteous, not even one." What does God owe us? What do we deserve from him?

The Executive Pastor at The Orchard is Scott Lothery, who was my boss for the last three years. He is famous at the church for a common exchange he has with his kids. They'll be fussing about what's fair or what they deserve and he'll stop them and say, "Hold on. What do you really deserve?" And they all know the right answer, "We know, Dad. Death and hell. Death and hell."

That is the truth. The one thing God owes to all people is death and hell. The wages of sin is death. If we demand what we deserve from God he will speak from the whirlwind and say, "Who is this who darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?" I don't think any of us want to have that conversation.

“God does not owe us, He owns us.” Jesus is our Lord, our King, the sovereign ruler of our lives. We are servants of Jesus Christ, Directed by Him.

Second, **we are Defined by Jesus**. Not only are Paul and Timothy servants of Christ Jesus, they call the believers at Philippi SAINTS. “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.”

How do you define yourself? Fill in the blank. “I am a _____.” I am a... sinner... a man... a woman... a student... a business person... a mom... a dad... a Christian... There are lots of ways we can define ourselves.

How often do you take the time to remember your true identity in Christ. “I am a SAINT.” Of course, on my own apart from Christ I am no saint. I am a sinner fully deserving God’s wrath and judgment. But by the wonderful grace of God, though I was dead in my sin God reached down, lifted me up, washed me off, dressed me in the righteousness of Christ and declared me righteous in Him. So now, before God, I am a saint.

And if you belong to Jesus that is true of you. You are no longer defined by your sin but by your Savior. You are defined by Jesus. And He says, You are a SAINT. A holy one. A righteous child of God, adopted into His forever family. You have a glorious inheritance awaiting you and have received the Holy Spirit as a deposit.

In Christ, we are saints. Hold on to that truth and remember that Jesus is the one who defines you. No one else can define you and say, “You’re a loser.” Even your own heart cannot define you and say, “You don’t matter.” The only one who can define you is the one who made you and who paid the price for your eternal redemption. And He is the one who says, “You are a SAINT.”

Remember that. We are directed by Jesus as His servants and we are defined by Him as His saints. Finally **we are Dependent on Jesus**.

This is why Paul always opens his letters with the phrase, "Grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Apart from God's grace there is no hope for any of us. But because of God's grace to us in Jesus Christ we have been reconciled to a holy and righteous God and therefore we HAVE peace with God through Jesus.

But let's remember how totally dependent we are on Jesus. This righteousness is not from us, as if we earned it or worked hard to attain it. It is a pure gift of God's grace. And we depend on His grace as much for our Christian growth each day as we did for our initial forgiveness. We need God's grace and peace every minute of every day.

Every breath we take is a gift from Him. Every minute He gives us is a gift. Nothing is guaranteed. We are utterly dependent on the Lord and we can trust Him completely to finish what He has started in us.

George Muller lived 92 years - through most of the 1800s. While he is most famous for his work among England's many orphans, in the midst of all of that work he pastored the same church in Bristol for 66 years, preaching more than 10,000 sermons. When he "retired" at the age of 70 it allowed him to fulfill a lifelong dream of doing mission work and spent the next 17 years traveling to 42 countries and preaching, on average, every single day, addressing some 3 million people.

In terms of sheer productivity, Muller's life is worth examining. He was a profoundly devoted servant of the Lord. He directly founded over 120 orphan homes, caring for over 10,000 orphans in his lifetime and inspiring others throughout England to start hundreds of other orphanages that would care for more than 100,000 children who otherwise would have been on the street or in prison.

But what reveals Muller's heart more than anything is how he endured suffering. His first wife died at the age of 66 after 39 years of marriage. His second wife died after 23 years of marriage. Of his four children, two were stillborn. His only son

died at one year of age. And his one daughter who lived to adulthood died at the age of 57. So Muller outlived his entire family.

But the Lord upheld him with the words of Psalm 84 - ***"The Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord will give grace and glory, no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." Of his wife's illness he said, "It is really good for me, my darling wife will be raised up again; sick as she is. God will restore her again. But if she is not restored again, then it would not be a good thing for me. And so my heart was at rest. I was satisfied with God. And all this springs, as I have often said before, from taking God at his word, believing what he says."*** (p. 68).

"I was satisfied with God." God was enough. Muller was totally dependent on the Lord, confident in God's will and surrendered to the Lord's direction.

Muller is best known for his convictions about fundraising - that he never once asked anyone directly for money. Yet the Lord brought in the modern equivalent of millions upon millions - not only for orphanages but for Bible translation and literature distribution. And for the last 68 years of his ministry he didn't take a salary but trusted the Lord to put it on peoples' hearts to give to him as the Lord would lead.

His motive in all of this was to glorify God. To prove with very practical means, that God can be trusted. That believers can and should take God at His word. The orphanages were a means to that end - showing that God is sufficient, that God is faithful.

So let's apply the faith of George Muller and the faith of the Apostle Paul to the coming hurricane and to the other challenges in our lives. Let's look to the Lord for direction. Let's be sure we let Him define us and not our circumstances or the people around us. And let's depend completely and unashamedly on Him for our life and breath and everything else!