

“The Process: Let it Cook” (Soul Food Pt. 2)
(Philippians 3:10-14)

- **Slow Cooking in a Microwave World**

- This is a series about *food!* Food is something you can't escape. We can't live without it. It relates to *everyone*. Not surprisingly, food is mentioned *all over* the Bible. In light of this, we're using food as a metaphor to understand our journey with Jesus, **Soul Food**. Last week we talked about the recipe: *what are the basic ingredients of a life with God?* But there's more to cooking than just throwing a bunch of ingredients together—baking is more than tossing some flour and eggs in a bowl, right? There has to be a *process* of cooking the ingredients to get the desired outcome. So, if we're talking about faith, what is the *process* that gets us from *the ingredients* to *end result*? That's what we're talking about today, **The Process: Let it Cook**.
- Now, if we're thinking about cooking, consider this for a moment: there was once a time when the process of cooking was pretty straightforward, but in the past hundred years or so, industrialization has *radically* changed how we do food. Imagine life before food processing, frozen foods, microwaves: if you wanted to cook the holiday feast, how much time and intentionality went into that process? You traveled to the market. You knew the merchants and their families and everyone there. You knew the farmer and the land and the mill the flour came from. You cultivated the soil and tended the garden for your produce. You raised and slaughtered the animal that was going to be prepared. And the cooking? How many days, and hours, and helping hands went into the preparation of that meal? How many generations of personally-handed-down cultural wisdom went into that holiday dinner?
 - Contrast that process with today: if you want, you can pick up your phone and get any feast you desire on your doorstep in 15 minutes without talking to a soul. If you want, you can grab something out of the freezer and just put it in the oven. You should've seen the look on my kids' faces when they first learned that their grandparents knew life *before the microwave*. The first microwave was invented in 1945 for commercial use in restaurants, they called it the *Radarange*: 6-feet tall and \$5,000 dollars! By the late 60's, they started marketing countertop microwaves for home use, only \$500. **(Pictures)** Now, I'm just as thankful as anyone for the microwave and the frozen food section, believe me (I reheated my coffee in the microwave 3 times writing this sermon). But how much have all these shortcuts impacted our process of cooking, our relationships with food and with each other, our health? We have to think about that if we're going to relate this stuff to our faith. Because the reality is, we live in a *microwave-kind-of-world*. But we're walking with a *slow-cooking-kind-of-God*. God is *much better* at waiting than we are; God likes to take His time; God is willing to wait *as long as it takes* to get *exactly what He wants*—because *He wants the best*.
- What does this mean? It means that if we're going to live out this salvation with our God as His children, as His disciples, *we're going to have to embrace the process, His process*—and for a microwave-culture like ours, *that can be really hard*. Have you ever found yourself intending at the start of the day to cook one thing for dinner, only to settle for fast food by the day's end?

- **The Prize and the Process**

- When I think about the *process* of our journey with Jesus, I go to *Philippians*—it's one of the most powerful books in the New Testament: written by the Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, *that's some good cooking!* Toward the end, Paul goes on a tangent about his own journey with Jesus, and he gives this incredible statement, our passage for today: ***“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 from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (3:10-14)***

- There is *so much* packed into this little nugget of Scripture, but it basically boils down to *the prize*, and *the process* it takes to get there. Let's start with *the Prize*, because if we don't get that, we won't get *the Process*. In cooking terms, this is the end result of putting those ingredients together and cooking them, this is the whole point, enjoying the meal! What's the end result of our journey with God? We can talk about the ingredients of following Jesus—God's Word and Prayer and Fellowship and Service—but what's the point, where's it all leading? Paul says he is *straining toward what is ahead, pressing on toward that prize*. The image is like an athlete *straining for* the finish line—have you seen how elite runners approach the finish line? They give a final burst and actually *lean forward* to get every millisecond-advantage they can to win. That's the kind of passion and tenacity Paul's using here.
- What is the prize, what is the goal that the Christian life is leading us to? Simply this: *knowing God, and sharing in His eternal life; knowing Christ, and becoming like Him*. The prize is *an intimate relationship with God* that leads to *the utter transformation of our lives—and eternally enjoying this new life with God, forever, in glory*. *Isn't that worth running the race for?*
- If you really stop and think about what this means, all the implications, how profoundly amazing it is—you'll understand why people like Paul speak about the gift of salvation *with such radical passion* and pursued Christ with such *reckless abandon*. Paul said that this gift was worth *everything*, and he demonstrated that with his life.
- Philippians was a letter written from prison—Paul was likely living in house arrest in Rome. The church of Philippi sent him a generous gift in the midst of his persecution so he could continue to minister the Gospel. In this letter, Paul thanks them, encourages them, warns them not to get distracted, reminds them how knowing who Jesus is should impact their life together, and inspires them to persevere in the midst of their suffering. He points them to the glory of Christ and tells them that it will all be worth it. Interestingly, even though Philippians was written from prison, it's the most *joyful* letter of the New Testament: it mentions “joy” 16 times in just 4 chapters! And the reason Paul can find joy in all circumstances is his *passion for the prize*.
- Just before the passage we read today, he said: **“I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8)** This is a hard thing to believe if you've never actually *experienced* the love of Christ. If Jesus is just a good moral teacher to you, if this is just a religious obligation, one duty among many, Paul sounds crazy. But if you've actually tasted and seen the goodness of God, if you've personally experienced Him reaching down to lift you out of the pit, *you know*. Jesus is the kind of person who, once you meet Him, everything else is *second*. When you encounter His saving touch on your life and you accept that He is the Lord, you know you've met the greatest, and nothing will ever compare. No one is better, nothing is greater than *knowing Jesus and the new life He offers*. Philippians 2 says, *His is the Name above every name*. Knowing Jesus, and becoming like Him, is simply the greatest prize we could imagine, the only goal worth running after.
- From the moment we begin our relationship with Jesus, receiving the gift of salvation by grace through faith, we begin a *lifelong process* of growing in an ever-deepening relationship with God—a union with God—and being transformed, step by step, to reflect His likeness and serve His mission. That's the process. That's the journey Paul's talking about in Phil. 3 when he says, *I want to know Him, I want to become like Him. I want to be so deeply united with Him that I actually identify with His sufferings and share in His resurrection power—that's the prize I'm running for! And no, I haven't made it all the way just yet, but I'm pressing on with all I am to take hold of that for which He took hold of me!* Paul calls it the “upward call,” the “heavenward call” of Christ: He came down to our level to lift us up to His level. He became like us, so we could become like Him. The *process* is allowing His grace to transform us from glory to glory, until we're like Him. 2 Cor. talks about it like this: **“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3:18)**
- So, the idea is, now that Christ has become one of us, sacrificed his life to free us from sin and resurrected to conquer death, we have a restored relationship with God. There is *nothing* that

needs to separate us anymore if we just receive the gift—no more veil between us—Paul says when we turn to Christ, *the veil separating us from God is taken away*. And now with unveiled faces, knowing Jesus, we see God for who He really is—and the more we come to know Him, the more we reflect His likeness—transformed from glory to glory. Wow!

- **From the Porch to the House**

- All of this is helping us understand *the race* and *the prize* Paul is talking about in Philippians. Earlier in the letter he gives another key insight into this process: “...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” (Phil. 2:12-13)
 - Salvation is a gift *and* a process, a journey. But the *work isn't up to us*, it's not *our work* that gets it done, but the *finished work of Jesus on the Cross—God is working in us to change us from the inside out to fulfill His purpose*. Nothing we do adds or takes away from God's gift of salvation in our lives—it's been fully taken care of by Jesus. But we do get to *participate in this process with God* as we let His grace work in and through us.
- And that's the word we need to land on to finish. *Grace*. If there's one word that define this whole process, it's *grace*. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement that we're part of, had a wonderful way of explaining this. He called it “the Scriptural way of salvation” and he used a wonderful analogy of *the House*. Check this out:
 - It starts outside, when you're walking down the lane. Maybe it's getting dark, and cold, and you see the warm light drawing you down the path toward the porch. This part of salvation is called **Prevenient Grace**. It's the grace of God that draws us to Christ *before we even know we need Him*. Then you get to the porch, and you have to decide if you're going to accept the invitation to go inside. The porch of salvation is **Convicting Grace**. It's the grace of God that leads us to *repentance*, where we become aware of our sin and our need to be forgiven. After that, the door opens and you finally walk in. This is **Justifying Grace**. This is what most of us focus on when we think of salvation. It's the grace of God that *cleanses us of sin*, where we receive full pardon, a clean slate, by fully trusting in the death and resurrection of Jesus to save us, apart from any merit of our own. But it doesn't stop there, it can't stop there—because the whole point of walking through the door is *entering the house*. This is **Sanctifying Grace**. Sanctification is the process of *being made holy*. It's the grace of God that *transforms us to become like Jesus*. God's good purpose in saving us is not only saving us from *penalty* of sin, but freeing us from the *power* of sin! Once you're drawn to the light of the house, and you make your way to the porch, and your step through the door, you get to spend the rest of your life *learning how to live in God's house*—you've got to discover the house rules, you've got to learn a new way of life, you've got to unlearn some things you brought in with you and learn some things you never knew before. It's learning to live as an adopted member of God's own household. It's letting go of all you once knew as a citizen of the world and learning the Way of Jesus as a *citizen of heaven* (by the way, Philippians talks about that too!) That's a lifelong journey—but *all of it from start to finish is by God's grace and God's grace alone*.
- So, all of this begs the question: *where are you today?* Where are you in the *process* of God's salvation working itself out in your life? And *how are you* in the midst of the process?
 - There are many people who come to the porch, but it seems like *they never actually make it through the door!* Unworthiness, or indecision, or control, or distraction, keeps them sleeping on the porch when God is saying, *come on in, there is so much more for you in here, trust me!*
 - Or maybe you've made it in the house, but you feel like you're stuck. I've seen people get discouraged and tempted to walk out the door, because they couldn't shake an old habit they brought in with them: the process seemed too long, they felt like the change should come quicker. Maybe there were things they were doing that blocked God's grace from fully working its way in their lives, or maybe God was just taking His time. But they lost heart, and lost hope.
- No matter where you are, or how you feel about it, the invitation is the same for all of us: *it's all by grace from start to finish*. It's all a gift. God saves us by His grace! God draws us by His grace. God convicts us and leads us to repentance by His grace. God forgives us and cleanses us by

His grace. God sanctifies and transforms us by His grace. We don't become holy by trying harder, we become holy by surrendering more and more to the grace of God, letting it go deeper and deeper in our lives. Salvation isn't like a coat of paint that covers the surface to mask what's underneath. Salvation is like *dye* that works its way *all the way through*. It's not a fast, cheap microwave meal. It's a priceless, slow-cooked feast.

- You've got to let Him do His work. You've got to embrace the process. Because *you, dear friend, are His beloved. You are the prize He strained with everything to reach and take hold of. You are His masterpiece. And He will stop at nothing to see that the work is completed: if you put your faith in Jesus and follow Him, one day you'll cross the finish-line into glory and see that He has made you new, through and through—you'll see just exactly what He meant when He meant you, free from sin, free from death, free from the weakness of this fallen world. Whole, complete, reflecting His glory, enjoying His goodness, forever.* This is what Jesus came and died and rose to do, for me and for you. For this reason, Paul began Philippians with this encouragement: ***"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*** (Phil. 1:6)
- Don't get discouraged. Put your eyes on the prize, and *receive His grace each moment to give you strength to press on toward the goal of the upward call in Christ. Let Him cook, embrace the process.*