

Philippians 2:12-18

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Well, good morning and welcome to Holy Trinity Church. It's great to hear the word read, especially from Aubrey Gibson, because in one week's time she will be Aubrey Lindbergh. She's on her way to get married. What's that song? I'm getting married in the morning. Something like that. Congratulations.

Something like that. The 18th century Englishman Samuel Johnson, known to us primarily through Boswell's biography, is credited with this saying, Depend upon it, sir. When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.

I think Paul's letter to the Philippians would support the idea. The apostle, not only at the time of writing, finds his life hanging in the balance, but this letter, the product of his wonderfully focused mind, never strays too far from a single idea.

The idea really came in 121, didn't it? With that four-letter word, only. Or, put differently, just one thing.

[2 : 40] Knowing that his life was flowing out, presumably here in the dungeon in Rome under Nero, and knowing that he had already appeared and made defense, yet wondering whether he would live or die, there's just one thing that he would write.

At that point, 127, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. At the end of the day, with death before him, just one thing.

Whether I'm here or not here, whether I live or die, let me know that you are living a life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Hidden in that phrase in 127 is a Greek use of a term concerning the city or citizenship.

It would almost read something like, let your citizenship be worthy of the gospel. Let your manner of life, the way you conduct yourself as a citizen, that's the metaphor that he picked up with.

[4 : 12] It's the metaphor that he will return to in chapter 3 verse 10. And now, at the opening of our own text, chapter 2 verse 12, we find his mind has not strayed very far.

For in 127 where he says, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, here, he just selects a new set of words which reiterate the precise idea stated differently.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence, here it is, stated differently, work out your own salvation.

The metaphor of citizenship is laid down and the plain speech of work it out is put forward. This is the one thing he wants.

The church in Philippi working it out. That is their salvation. That is, if you're already citizens from glory, then work it out while here.

[5 : 30] Work out your own salvation. That is his aim. Let me put it differently. A worthy life, 127, is a life at work, 2, 12, and 13.

Let me put it differently. If you're saved for that day, then get yourself to work in this day.

There is another line not attributed to Johnson, but this one, Oliver Wendell Holmes. I'm not sure whether he actually said it or not, but it goes something to the effect that he or she was so heavenly minded that they were of no earthly good.

For Paul, it's just the opposite. A worthy life is a life at work. Work out your salvation. In other words, that Christianity by nature is active, not passive.

It's not gathering merely to hear the word proclaimed. It is the scattering into the streets in which it is demonstrated.

[6 : 55] Work it out. Be at work. This, Paul then, would dispel by this 2, 12, and 13 any sense that the church in Philippi just was passively waiting for the day, knowing that their citizenship was there and it was guaranteed by the death of Christ.

In fact, he says, since you are citizens of heaven, live lives now that are worthy of it. Going to glory? Then get up!

here. This is what he wants. Now, there's just a couple of textual observations then that I think fill out this commitment to active Christian engagement and by way both of seeing that connection and also by way of keeping you from misunderstanding.

You see the word there that opens verse 12. Therefore, it actually is connected all the way back to 127. This manner of life that's worthy of the gospel which I've been explaining to you, which I've put forward to you, which I've given you Jesus Christ as a model set before you, all these things, therefore, work it out.

And notice, it's not that the Christian community is to be working for salvation. salvation. You're to work out your salvation. This isn't something that you earn or merit or on the level of your competency, therefore, you get at the end of the day.

[8 : 37] Having been given salvation through faith in Christ by grace, now go work it out. Grow up into it. This is what his desire was for the church at Philippi.

And notice the confidence that comes from it. It is extraordinary. He says to work it out with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

You work it out knowing that God is working in you and God has worked for you. this is a great aspect of confidence.

Now, remember what he had said earlier in the letter. He had grounded that in chapter 1, verse 6. We've already sung about it this morning. In chapter 1, verse 6, and I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

That God has done something. God has initiated. He is working. He's not passively on the throne waiting for his eternal kingdom. He is presently working and calling people to himself, placing his spirit within them, and he intends for them to be at work in the world.

[10 : 01] But he who has begun that good work is going to complete it, and in our own text, you're to work out your salvation, not for your salvation, and under the confidence that it is God who is actually already working.

He has something he wants done in you, and in this place. And so Paul puts it out there. Work it out. This is your aim.

If you're a citizen of heaven, then you ought to work out that reality long before you walk those streets. The Christian community, then, ought to be the place where we actually get a glimpse of what life will look like in heaven.

Now, I know there's all kinds of articles and stories and experiences. People begin to wonder, well, I wonder what it will look like. What will it look like when we get there? Well, in theory, we should have a deposit already on the streets of Hyde Park.

Because those who are citizens of heaven have not yet arrived through those gates, but they walk these streets. And as the world sees you, as the world sees us, it should see a glimpse, a glimmer, a sliver, hopefully an ever enlarging portion of the pie of what heaven will look like.

[11 : 33] This, of course, is the great disaster in the world today, that when the world looks at the church, it sees so little of heaven. heaven. So, if that's his aim, to work it out, how do you make application?

There are two primary applications. You can see it begins there in verse 14. Do all things without grumbling or disputing. The disputation word is a word from which we get something like just dialoging.

We're in discussion. We're in conversation. But it's a conversation. It's a discussion that has a kind of malignant side to it. An embittered side to it.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing. Discussing things in ways that are unhelpful and unprofitable.

Interesting, isn't it? I mean, if you were to close your eyes and ask yourself, now you're going to follow the aim that people are to work out their salvation, what's the very first thing you want to say by way of application?

[12 : 53] He goes to our speech. More than that, he goes to the internal spirit with which we are living with one another. The proof, he says, of heaven being present through the church members in Philippi, is that they would possess a joyful speech of deference toward one another and unanimity in the spirit.

That's the sign that heaven's come to earth. Joyful speech with deference to one another and unanimity in the spirit.

spirit. It's interesting, when he's looking for words on this, he actually chooses two words that have been grouped together in ancient Israel's past.

Grumbling and disputing are the words put together in the book of Numbers and elsewhere, meant to depict the people of Israel.

In other words, God's people were known as a grumbling and dissenting kind of spirit. So he's borrowing words that in a sense echo ancient Israel's downfall.

[14 : 24] And so if you're asking yourself, what do we do? What are we supposed to stay away from? All you needed to do in Philippi was to hear those words together, link them with ancient Israel, and ask yourself, what were their grumbings about?

What were their quarrels about? There are three things. First, they grumbled against God concerning whether or not he was present with them.

You ever have that question? I mean, I think we all do. You lay in bed at night and you wonder, are you really here? Which at one level can be just a genuine question, but there turns something over in the mind when we begin to make accusation against God concerning primarily whether or not he even provides for us.

Do you have any concern, God, that I'm actually here? Do you care for me? what is this situation you've placed me in? They grumbled against God.

Secondly, they grumbled against the leaders that God had given them. They began to look at Moses across the way and say, well, I don't even know if God is with us, but obviously that guy is not.

[15 : 47] In fact, he would be providing for us in a different way if he were really with us. And so they began to turn their speech against Moses.

And Moses gets caught off guard and says to God, well, what's going on here? And he says, well, I know they're saying something against you, but realize it is ultimately attached against me. The people don't trust that I love them.

the third area of their grumbling, that is Israel's, in the wilderness, was against one another.

I mean, what did Moses spend all of his day doing? What did Augustine in the fourth century spend nearly all his day doing? What did the judges through ancient Israel's history spend all their day doing?

They were simply sitting down in an adjudicating case law within the assembly. Factious spirit.

[16 : 58] So these are the three things that are all embedded in this idea of applying. If you actually want to work out your salvation, then he's saying don't be speaking against God.

Don't always be questioning whether or not he's with us. Be careful, if you have godly leadership, to direct, why don't you do something different for us?

And when you consider one another, don't continue to think, I need someone to arbitrate because he's done something against us. Your speech is actually the indication of a heart.

heart. In the end, in the end, in the end for Israel, this was a dangerous thing. Their grumbings and disputing were signs, external signs, of a soul that was so malignant that eventually God says they shall not enter my rest.

heart. Which is why, I think, Paul says here, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

[18 : 12] I mean, you can just say, I just need to vent on this, but be fearful, lest that act be the habit and that habit, the pattern and the pattern, the character, and the character actually being God isn't here, nobody's here, and you demonstrate through your speech to have an unbelieving heart.

So, work it out, he says, with fear and trembling. Let me put it to you this way, when we arrive at heaven, I know exactly what's going to happen.

Well, in this sense. Very limited sense. When we see God, the grumbling is going to go away, we're going to look Him in the eye, and basically we're just going to say this, hey, I'm sorry, forgive me. When we see one another coming down the road, knowing the things that were held while here, it will be an embarrassed walk to the cross, and an attention from face to face, and the arms will go like this, and we'll say, hey, I'm sorry, forgive me.

Therefore, if that's the way it's going to be with us, on that day, work it out in this day.

[20 : 14] this is what he puts before the people. And what's interesting is, you know, Paul, having used this little two word, these two words that might let all the people think, oh my gosh, he thinks we're ancient Israel.

He thinks the church in Philippi is on the bad side of eternal rest. He doesn't feel that way about them, does he? We've already seen 1.6. He who began a good work in you is going to complete it. He knows that there are minor rufflings in the congregation, and he wants to smooth them out, but he has a sense that their character is good.

You can see that because of the way he fills it out. Notice verse 15. Do all things without grumbling or disputing that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God, without blemish, here's the phrase, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world.

This phrase, this twisted and crooked generation, was also used by Moses of Israel in Deuteronomy 32. So Moses called the people of God not only a grumbling people, but they were a twisted and crooked generation.

[21 : 38] Paul does not want Philippi to think that he puts them in that same camp. So he says, do all things without grumbling or disputing, recognizing that you are to be lights in the world.

That's my confidence in you. Because you're in the midst of a generation that doesn't love me. Well, it's a wonderful thing for having given them fearful words.

He then surrounds them with this sense of pastoral comfort concerning who they really are. Look at the motivation then.

I mean, it's a wonderful motivation. Do all things without grumbling or disputing that, that you might in a sense be pure and blameless and shining like lights in the world.

I mean, did you realize that there's a missional benefit to the world when we treat one another with humble speech of deference and unanimity of spirit?

[22 : 45] There was a kid's song. We used to sing it to our kids all the time. Something like, do everything without complaining.

Do everything without arguing so that you may become blameless and pure children of God.

Without complaining. Without arguing. That's what he did. That's from this verse. Well, what Paul is doing is he's taking the children's choir and he's putting them in the adult congregation and that is the song he is singing that we would be children of light.

I want you to try to do that one after the service today, Ben. Yeah. Yeah. The children teaching the church.

So I just ask us, how are we doing? How are we doing? How are you doing? Grumbling against God?

[24 : 06] In discussion with others on leadership that really is disintegrating? That is your discussion.

Speaking notes of discord against one another? Nothing, nothing, nothing will dim the light of the gospel more quickly than a local assembly that does not demonstrate a speech of humble deference and a unanimity of spirit toward God, toward his leadership, toward one another.

And I know that there are many people here today. I know because I talk with some of you, many people here today who are not Christians and yet you've been walking in and listening, coming alongside and watching, listening even.

all I want to say is continue to come. Stay with us. Walk among us.

Sit in our living rooms and see if we do not by our very speech make an argument for the truth which we articulate.

[25 : 35] I ask you do not our words which we profess act as a proof of the truths that are found in Christ.

we are your apologetic. I can see the day when people come to Christ and they are asked well what turned the key for you?

Why did you move out of one religion into that? Why did you quit standing on the sidelines and actually hold it? Did somebody offer you some great fail-safe proof on the resurrection that for the first time in centuries stunned your mind with solidity of belief?

Well perhaps but more than likely some will yet even one day hear be baptized and say if you want to know why I believe it's because I lived and walked and dwelt for a while among those who were citizens of heaven and everywhere else I went in the world whether it be my job my school my profession my family my neighborhood my city all I saw was factious engagement and then I encountered Christ bubbling up and out of the speech of those who are members of Holy Trinity in Hyde Park conversely if you are here and have been here for a while and I know that many of you are well then judge us according to the same for if we do not demonstrate to you deference of speech and unanimity of spirit then call it for what it is I am confident that he who began a good work in you in us will bring it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ I am confident that this room is filled with men and women who are concerned with only one thing

[28 : 44] I am convinced that that thing is living lives that are worthy of the gospel and I know through their witness that it is not passive but active and I am convinced that we are here to work it out with confidence and that the first proof of its legitimacy is our way with one another in speech he goes on it's not the only application but verse 14 holding fast to the word of life it's the second application you want to work it out hold fast to the word of life now I don't think that this is merely related to content as if the first one is our way of life and this one relates specifically to the content or the word of life this is a more full orbed expression than limiting it to do you believe the right thing to hold fast is another way of saying stand firm it concerns the word that was proclaimed to you and the way of life that is by implication given to you now remember that Paul if he's writing at the close of life in a

Roman jail has his mind wonderfully focused on what life truly is and when you turn to the pastoral epistles specifically second Timothy which is a final letter written to him he has this repeated refrain on life it actually occurs only in his letters to Timothy in the opening that Paul has been given something that is a message with a promise of life and I've often wondered why does he speak of a promise of life or a word of life it's because the gospel that he proclaims came to him through the sufferings and the death of Christ and he came to this revolutionary understanding that life came through death and there were many who wanted life without death they wanted salvation without suffering they wanted all the consequences of glory without the implications of enduring and so when Paul says now hold fast to the word of life he is saying to a church that is under duress he is saying to a church that is under in some sense opposition from the outside he is saying to a church that is learning through their experience that not everything goes well with those who profess Christ's name he is saying to them don't you neglect that suffering is the way of life hold fast to it and in the states my goodness we are perpetuating a gospel around the world that says you can have salvation without suffering that you can name it you can claim it you can get it and it's all now I've heard it on different continents I've labored with men and women who give their lives to correcting what's coming out of this country concerning the word of life and let me tell you we could put any Christian on a plane from Syria or Pakistan or any part of the world almost and throw them here on a Sunday morning and they would say to you hold fast to the word of life and by that I don't merely mean that you can be saved by the work of

Christ I mean you are willing! to endure! you are willing to suffer you are willing to understand that that comes with great cost that's what he says to the church in Philippi you want to work out your salvation bear up under the weight of the gospel you believe you want to arrive on that day seated at the marriage supper of the lamb then get on your knees in this day and serve a table or two that's the way he's putting it that's what he wants I don't know what your vocation is but if you profess the name of Christ you exist to serve that context with the love of Christ if you are behind a desk writing for a particular field you exist not merely to rise in your field but to put forward the true faith of the gospel for all those who know you now this is what

Paul says to the church in Philippi I've only got one thing to tell you he says before I leave live a life worthy live a life at work and make it known by what you say and your willingness to never let go of all the implications that come as a result and so then he closes even verse 17 I like the idea of it even being contrastive more like but but he says in conclusion if I am going to die may it be upon an offering of your faith in other words hey if I'm going down with this may may on my way down may may

[34 : 54] I see that you yourself are a sacrificial offering in other words may you and I be the same thing may my pouring out of my life be equated with your own sacrificial service so that me Paul the apostle and you the church are doing the one thing together as I'm spent may I see you are serving that's what he wants the motivations there verse 16 so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain don't you love it don't grumble that you might shine as a proof in this day hold fast that you might put a smile on the apostles face in that day those are the motivations do this work this out because it will make a difference in the world work this out because

I'm really wanting to be proud of you when it comes and so he finishes hey whether I'm dying may it may it may my death be wedded to your own death and I'm going to be glad that's the argument just one thing Samuel Johnson depend upon it sir when a man knows he's to be hanged in a fortnight it concentrates his mind wonderfully well church we are all here for but a fortnight if you live a long life you're almost done I can tell you that because I'm starting to see the end and how quick it came one thing one thing work it out knowing that he will complete it in you our heavenly father we pray for our hearts that that we would that we would be gripped by what we need to be doing individually collectively

I pray for many here today who do not profess the name of Christ may may our way with one another win the day for their belief and we ask oh Lord that you would enable us to persevere until we see you face to face give us joy in that journey in Christ's name amen let's stand and go out under a song together