

Lights to the World

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[0 : 0 0] Lord's Day in the morning we looked at Philippians 2 and the first part of the section in a general way looking at what the Apostle has to say about Christ's coming and we did so by way of reminder of what Christmas is about it's the coming of the Son of God into this world God made flesh Christmas itself isn't so important that Christ's coming is and this is in fact a vital event in the history of the world that God should enter his creation as our Savior and Redeemer it was necessary that Christ should take on flesh and come in our nature to die upon the cross for us but we now need to look a little closer at what the Apostle has to say in order to apply this great fact and by that I mean not only that we have come to Christ and are saved which is where we start and where we begin we must begin with him and our trust of him but now we need to consider how this affects our lives as Christians and after his opening greetings and his thanksgiving and prayer Paul wanted the Philippians to know that despite his imprisonment the gospel was still advancing and he urges them to live for Christ and the danger that the Philippian church as the church of every age faces is one of disunity and we're all prone to it so the Apostle Paul is encouraging the believers to strive for spiritual unity one amongst the other and with the whole of the church and he bases that his argument on the example of Christ's humility who emptied himself and took upon him the form of a servant and we are to act as servants one to another and to maintain a spiritual unity amongst ourselves he says also in this section that with Christ as the example

Christ as the example we as believers are to live as lights in the world Christ came as the light to lighten the Gentiles he is the light of the world but the world of today is still very dark and we are to be the light shining reflecting if you like the light of Christ because the world desperately needs that light this evening and we are the ones who with the whole of the church and all the people of God are the bearers of the light of Christ to the world let's just remind ourselves again of what the Apostle says as we look at these verses again let me read them to you again Philippians chapter 2 and the verses 12 to 8 Paul says therefore my beloved as you have always obeyed so now not only as in my presence but much more in my absence work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it's God who works in you both to will and to work for 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 labour 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 so then by way of introduction let me draw attention to something that the late John Stott said apparently when he visited the USA one day he said to the Americans you know what your own country is like I am a visitor and I wouldn't presume to speak about America but I know what Great Britain is like

I know something about the growing dishonesty corruption immorality violence pornography the diminishing respect for human life and the increase in abortion whose fault is it let me put it like this he said if the house is dark at night there is no sense in blaming the house that's what happens when the sun goes down the question to ask is where is the light if meat goes bad there is no sense in blaming the meat what is what happens when the bacteria are allowed to breed unchecked the question to ask is where is the salt if society becomes corrupt like a dark night or stinking fish there is no sense in blaming society that's what happens when fallen human society is left to itself and human evil is unrestrained and unchecked the question to ask is where is the church

I believe that what Stott said to the Americans is true for us today the Philippian church existed in a fallen human society human evil was unrestrained and unchecked and nothing has changed in this millennia since then and it won't change until the return of Christ you this church congregation here

also exists in a fallen human society human evil is unrestrained and unchecked around us and it's important that we should act as light and as salt in society and it's important thus that we grasp what the Apostle Paul's argument is in these verses in verse 12 you'll notice that he begins this verse with the word therefore and therefore always refers back to what has been said before and the Apostle's custom in writing is to lay out the theology but it's not something that's a mere academic exercise he wants it to affect the way in which we live the way in which we are as Christians and he always comes to this point where he says such and such is true theologically true therefore this is how you are to apply this is how you ought to live as Christians he set out before earlier in this chapter how that

[9 : 25] Christ has come into this world to serve us he's left the courts of glory as we reflected at the beginning of the week and he is he came taking our nature not our sin but taking our nature our humanity the creature becoming the creator becoming the creature and not just coming as a king of kings but born in a stable laid in a manger lowly as low as you can get as a human and he does this in order that he sets an example he sets a principle too that we can come to him and we dealt with that but he sets this as an example of how we are to serve one another and also how we too are to serve the world in the name of

Christ we are here for this purpose this is why we are left on earth it might be more convenient for us certainly if as soon as we were converted to Christ he took us to be with him and we wouldn't have to suffer this world but it's necessary for this world that we should remain and act as witnesses and act as being the lights in the world so the apostle Paul is saying in effect to believers in these earlier verses of this chapter he says you've heard me urge you to do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility to count others more significant than yourselves and you see that goes against the grain of our day which has this philosophy and outlook of what's right for me is right what I want to do is what

I'm going to do and I don't care about the consequences if I tread on your toes it doesn't bother me and we are growing up in a very self centred society but we as Christians are not to follow the way of the world in this it's our natural tendency it's the sin of old Adam it's me being God it's me deciding what's right and wrong it's me doing what I want to do but we're not to be like that and Paul is telling us that we're to follow the supreme example of the humility of Christ Jesus who humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on the cross you see Jesus wasn't just taken by evil men and well it just transpired that he was crucified he deliberately went to the cross that's why he came to die for us to lay down his life for us he in this he was our servant and he was obedient to the point of death even that cruel death of the cross and Paul goes on that God approved of Christ's humiliation by highly exalting him and bestowing upon him the name that is above every name and in the light therefore of Christ's example he says therefore let the gospel have a profound effect on your conduct as

Christians so we're coming then to the application of Christ's coming to Christmas if you like that God has come in the flesh in Jesus Christ what does it mean for us in practical terms and that's what the apostle is teaching us how we are to conduct our lives as Christians in the light of the coming of Christ and as we face a new year how we are to begin that year how we are to go on through that year and all the years that God allows us to be here until he comes again or takes us from our place we are to live in this way as the apostle sets it out for us so we are going to look at two aspects of what

[15 : 06] Paul says again we don't have time to look at it in great detail it will take a lot longer than we have time for but there are two principles first is the general exhortation that he gives in verses 12 and 13 and then in the rest of the section from 14 to 18 he gives us some concrete content and we'll look at these two things first of all then the general exhortation in verses 12 and 13 therefore my beloved as you have always obeyed so now not only in my presence but much more in my absence work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it's God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure there he's laying down in a general instruction to us and this itself has two sections first of all it's our work in verse 12 what we do it seems that the

Philippian church was a favourite of the apostle Paul perhaps it was because it was the first church that he planted in Europe you remember how he was called to come to Macedonia to Greece and he came to Philippi the prominent city Roman city in Greece and maybe that's why it appears to have been a favourite with the apostle he proclaimed the gospel to them and they responded wonderfully to the good news of salvation you remember you remember Lydia was converted here

in Philippi and also the Philippian jailer was converted and also the young woman who was going fortune telling for her masters was also set free

Paul set forth that salvation is by faith alone in Christ and it's alone by God's grace the Philippian church seemed to have generally been a healthy church and was so when Paul wrote to her but there were traces of conflict notably that of Eurodia and Syntyche in chapter 4 the second verse these two women seem to have been engaged in a squabble a falling out and Paul urges that the other members of the congregation should encourage them to mend their differences and come together otherwise it's causing disunity in the church but there ever lurked an ever present danger of discord and disunity and it's always with us because we're not yet made perfect and we do rub each other up the wrong way each of us has sharp edges and corners that need to be knocked off smoothed down and we can irritate people and we need to know how to deal with one another in love together and it's very hard and difficult sometimes to do that it's inevitable that we will find that some

Christians are easier to get on with than others the way to get on with us with each other all of us together and we have to learn how to do that and this is what Paul is concerned about he's concerned to nip in the bud these signs of conflict within the congregation and so he says to them just as you always obeyed when I was around but now I'm not there I'm in prison it's more important that you get on with each other that you obey the gospel and obey me as an apostle setting forth the word of God to you they embrace the gospel and they are to continue to walk in obedience to that gospel and their obedience was not to Paul of course but to the word

Jesus Christ but now there was this problem beginning to arise that Paul is concerned shouldn't go any further and so he says even though I'm not among you carry on doing what you know you should be doing obeying in the gospel but what were those believers to do how were they to conduct their lives in gospel obedience how are we to do that well again Paul gives us the answer in the last part of verse 12 where he says work out your own salvation with fear and trembling he he's what he sets forth here is one of the most misunderstood verses of the whole of the bible many people believe that

[21 : 34] God saves us when we do our part we do our bit and we earn God's favor and then God saves us and they say well after all isn't that what Paul is saying work out your own salvation with fear and trembling but this is where the context is of course important because the next verse says that it's God who saves us and God alone for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure we must never look at our salvation as coming from ourselves we can't do anything to contribute to our salvation and we don't need to Christ has done it all on the cross he cried it is finished he doesn't mean it's all up that's that's it he's saying the work is complete all that's necessary is done it's finished and it's

God that works but even this verse itself verse 12 in the second the last part of the last section the last clause of this verse says work out your own salvation with fear and trembling the verse doesn't say work for your salvation it doesn't say work towards your salvation it says work at your salvation work out your salvation and no one can work for his salvation until God has already worked it in us it begins with God and what God has done we are the ones who take on and apply it and work it out and this is exactly what the apostle wants us to understand we are to live out our salvation you see if we are

Christians we are saved people we are people who have been changed we are new creatures in Christ we are a new creation and we are to live in the light of that it's not something we can do just as we have no part in our birth but since we have been born we have lived out our life so it is so it is with the spiritual and new birth we are to live out what God has brought to birth within us the new life so we are to be Christians who live as Christians we work out in that way live out our salvation in our life here and that's what the apostle is referring to here he's not saying that we are to play our part and God will play his part if we are good enough not at all

God has already worked in us given us new life live it for him so we come then to the second part of this first part that is a general exhortation and that is God's work verse 13 says for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure so Paul is telling us that we are working out what God has already done within us Jim Packer expressed it in this way he says God saves sinners by this we mean that God the triune Jehovah Father Son and Spirit three persons working together in sovereign wisdom power and love to achieve the salvation of a chosen people the Father electing the Son fulfilling the Father's will by redeeming the Spirit executing the purpose of

Father and Son by renewing saves does everything first to last that is involved in bringing man from death in sin to life in glory plans achieves communicates redemption calls and keeps justifies sanctifies glorifies sinners men as God finds them guilty vile helpless powerless unable to lift a finger to do God's will or better their spiritual lot it's all of God to work within us the gospel thus transforms us we have become the sons and daughters of the living God once as Peter says we were nobodies now we are the children of God by adoption we have a new nature the old is gone we have a renewed will we desire to please

[27 : 41] God Blaise Pascal put it this way God makes us do what he pleases by making us desire what we might not desire because of what God has done we are now able to live out our salvation for the good pleasure of God so then in verses 12 to 13 Paul is teaching us man's responsibility and God's sovereignty now tons of energy are expended trying to pit the two against each other but in fact the Bible insists that both belong together we are responsible for how we live and God is completely sovereign in all things the A. Carson has put it this way God's continuous gracious sovereign work in our lives becomes for us an incentive to press on with fear and trembling and this leads us then to the second point the effect of the gospel on our lives a concrete content and that's in the remaining verses of this section if God has worked salvation in us we are to work it out we are to live it out and how does that look though well first of all

Paul says that there are three ways in which the gospel or gospel conduct is expressed in our lives first of all it's to do all things without grumbling or disputing I don't need to amplify that we all know what it is to grumble and to dispute but we ought not to do it because we are to follow Christ and this is something that we are to develop within ourselves but in 15 and the first part of 16 the apostle says that we 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 hold and 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 labour in vain Carson again says in other words Christian contentment a thing the apostle takes up later in the epistle stands out in a selfish whining self-pitying world and we've already referred to the self-centeredness of our day but as Christians we are to be different to the world the world may make fun of us and mock us and deride us but that is not of importance what is important is that we are like Christ and we will be a thorn in the flesh to the world and a pricking of their conscience as we as the church live together without grumbling or disputing and that's how we are to shine as lights in the world or the first way then

Paul says that the gospel conduct delights Christian leaders and we read that bit in the second part of the verse 16 so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labour in vain Paul says Paul wants the Philippian church to do everything without grumbling and disputing so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labour in vain Paul wants to see a maturing faith among the Philippian believers and that's to be our condition as well we are to mature in this he wants to be delighted in their gospel conduct Paul Paul was in prison but he says to them that in the day of

Christ I may be proud and didn't run in vain or labour in vain because these Philippians put into practice what he is saying from the example of Christ and then thirdly he says that gospel conduct obedient conduct produces joy in the leaders and also in other believers Paul says in verse 17 and the first part 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 he uses the picture of both in pagan practice and pagan worship and also in Jewish worship of sometimes pouring out a sacrificial libation on the offering and he says if

[34 : 09] I am poured out that is I am put to death yet nevertheless it is on your faith he says and Paul sees the Philippines as priests offering a sacrificial offering of faith followed by his pouring his own libation over the sacrifice eyes and it is a figure of speech he is using here to involve them along with him in this obedience and the gospel he views his service as a compliment or contribution to their service and so it is with each of us that we compliment and contribute together in our service of the Lord together we are not a lot of individuals we are the church we are believers together and we must never lose sight of that we must each of us come to a personal faith but we don't remain isolated one from another it is one of the reasons why we meet together like this evening or on the

Lord's day we come together because we belong together those who say that they are Christians and they can worship just as well at home on their own or walking through the countryside and the

beauties of the earth and they can praise God there is a degree of truth in that but in this the point we come together as the people of God together and we serve together complementing one another contributing one with the other together and so Paul is giving us that lead and that instruction in this alright our time's gone let me just point out that the early church succeeded where we're failing they transformed the western world in a relatively short time and we're not and they did so because they were different the early church baffled the Romans they didn't picket they didn't boycott they didn't gripe about the way things were going in their culture they just did things that astonished the Romans they for instance took in Roman abandoned babies and housed them and fed them and looked after them whereas the Romans had rejected they helped those Romans who were sick and wounded they restored dignity to the slaves they were willing to die for what they believed they transformed marriage the relationship of husband and wife as Christians and we are to transform our society by living in the way that we've tried to outline and certainly that Paul has told us that we are to do being imitators of Christ but because we've lost that it seems to me we're not having the influence that we should have in the world we may not be very prominent in the world in terms of the world we're not very important as far as the world is concerned but we're vital because we're light and we're to act as light as the people of God as we stand between 2019 and 2020 can I simply say this the gospel has changed us we need to change the world in Christ by living as Christ by being lights in the world and living out that salvation that has been wrought in us gospel conduct says do all things without grumbling and disputing gospel conduct delights Christian leaders and gospel conduct produces joy in both leaders and believers may this be true for each one of us in 2020 let us pray