

Working out your salvation

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[0 : 00] Philippians chapter 2, verses 12 to 18. 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 is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 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. Good morning.

Thanks for opening up this preaching spot for me. It's a great privilege to be able to preach here. And honestly, a great birthday present too. So allow me to lead us in prayer as we come to God's word.

[1 : 32] Father, you love your church. So as we hear your word this morning, we ask that you press it upon our hearts. Grow our love for you.

Build us up into a community that stands united in one spirit, each taking the same attitude as Christ. Amen. It's Saturday morning.

The ringing of my phone jolts me awake, destroying the last hope of a sleep-in. What's that? There's no ice for the drinks at the church open day. Sure, I'll come in early and buy some on the way.

But inwardly, I'm longing for the warm bed as I feel the cool morning air. Can't someone else do it? I was supposed to be on the later shift. I quickly wolf down some cereal and navigate through the cluttered corridor to the sink. The sink is full of dishes.

[2 : 31] Why is it always me? Can't they see I'm in a rush? I wash the dishes and head off to help at the church open day, still wishing I was having the day off.

What kind of witness will the visitors at that church open day see? What kind of king is on display? The ringing of my phone jolts me awake.

It's Saturday morning. What's that? There's no ice for the drinks at the church open day? Sure, I'll come in early and buy some on the way. I'm still groggy from waking up, but I thank God for the day as I open the window and smell the fresh morning air.

I had chosen the later shift for exactly this possibility, to be able to cover any jobs that had been missed in planning. I give thanks for God's provision of breakfast and head out to the sink.

On the way, I see that my housemates have laid out their things in the corridor, ready to face their own days. I say a quick prayer for their days and thank God for these gospel-minded men.

[3 : 46] Getting to the sink, I see that I'm not the only one who's in a rush this morning. The sink is full of dishes. Remembering that Christ became the servant of all, I wash up the dishes, so that those still to finish their breakfast can come to an empty sink.

I feel annoyed at those who's thoughtlessly left their mess behind. But as I remember that Christ entered my mess, I see how trivial the matter is. I head out to help at the church open day, praying that those who visit might see more than just the historic building, that they would also see the church that gathered there and the one who brought us together.

So what's the difference between those two stories? Well, the first one was driven by grumbling and complaining, what we might call a desire for a hassle-free life.

And the second one was driven by remembering gospel perspective. It might sound a bit contrived, but that was a real Saturday morning in my life.

And that initial attitude to the day ended up setting the tone, not just for that day, but for my whole time at that church. I won't tell you which one is truer to life, but I will give you the question that came from it.

[5 : 11] How did we get from story one to story two? How did we take on the mind, the attitude of Christ, the one who is God, yet became a servant?

How did we respond when faced with life's pressures, the small conflicts and misunderstandings that inevitably arise from community life? How did we deal with the grumbling and arguing that just comes out so naturally when we're under pressure, given jobs that we don't want to do?

In this part of the letter, Paul urges the Philippians to live in light of what Christ has done. And we can summarize Paul's instructions with three words. Remember, replace, and rejoice.

Remember how you got here and continue obeying by working at your salvation. Replace grumbling with gospel wonder, shining like stars. And rejoice in our gospel partnership, even as we suffer for the gospel.

So how are we to respond to Christ's example? Remember, replace, and rejoice. First up is remember. Remember how you got here and thus continue obeying by working at your salvation.

[6 : 29] Looking at verse 12, these are Paul's beloved. Those who have always obeyed when he was there, but now that he's separated from them, he wants them to continue.

This is not a new instruction from Paul, but really an urging for them to keep going on the path that they've already been going down. It's like a coach sending a sports team out onto the field.

I've seen you do it in practice, so get out there and do it. Now is not the time to be intimidated by the opposition. Now is not the time to get into petty squabbles with your teammates.

Remember what we practiced. Remember, Jesus was obedient to death, death on a cross. He is the servant greater than the master.

As followers of the humble king, we have been freed to follow the same path of humble obedience. Now is not the time to lose sight of how he got here.

[7 : 26] Now, Paul reminded them of their prior friendship and their prior obedience. But there's one more key part to how they got here. Not just Paul working or them working, but they got here because God is working.

And second half of verse 12. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Why? Because it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Notice that when Paul talks about fear and trembling, he's echoing the Old Testament. Proverbs 1. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Or Deuteronomy 4 and Psalm 34. Teach your children to fear the Lord. So not terror. Rather, a right weighty respect in fear and trembling is appropriate.

Because God himself is working in you. Your actions reflect back on God. But alongside the weightiness of God working in us, there is a wonder too.

[8 : 34] Every step we take to becoming more like Christ, the very desire to follow after him, it comes from God. And God works according to his good pleasure.

We are temperamental. One day we are passionate. And the next day we are indifferent. But God is not like that. He doesn't feel hot one day and cold the next. Unlike our failing and stumbling efforts, he always loves to work in us as we work out our salvation.

He works according to his good pleasure. Maybe one way to grasp how this should make us feel is like this. Imagine a plane designed to teach learner pilots.

It has two sets of controls. One set for the student and one set for the teacher. Piloting a plane is a weighty responsibility. And fooling around will lead to disaster.

But when the teacher is there, watching, ready to correct any mistakes, the student pilot can feel safe and confident to take off and learn how to fly.

[9 : 40] God calls us to trust him and to live like Christ, even when humble service feels scary and daunting. But even better than a flying instructor.

God gives us everything it takes to step out into the unknown, to step out in vulnerability. How can I approach that person who hurt me and seek reconciliation?

It's just too hard, too daunting. I would rather just sweep it under the rug and let it fester. But God is working in you. You can step out knowing that he loves gospel reconciliation.

And he's working according to his good pleasure. Stepping out in vulnerability and faith can be so daunting that it feels like death. We hold our idols so closely that letting go of them, to put them in

their proper place, feels like death.

How could I possibly live without a secure job? How could I possibly live without getting married, with this aching loneliness inside?

[10:51] Or how could I possibly live in this marriage that no longer satisfies? It can feel like death, letting go of an idol. But remember, Christ Jesus humbled himself to death.

Death on a cross, so that we can live with him, the one exalted to the highest place. Remember, God is working in you.

So step out in faith, working out your salvation with fear and trembling. So we're called to remember how we got here. Remember, you've already started down the path.

And remember, that God is the one working in you. Remember, so that you can step out. But there's also a kind of stepping out that's begrudging.

Saying, God, I've given up so much and now you owe me. I've done this for you. And now you have to do this for me. And this brings us to our second point.

[11:52] Replace grumbling with gospel wonder, shining like stars. Grumbling and disputing was the problem that Paul wanted to nip in the bud at Philippi.

Look at verses 14 and 15. And this time, keep an ear out for the echoes of Israel in the wilderness after the Exodus. Verse 14. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 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.

When Israel wandered in the wilderness, they forgot God's promises. They didn't believe God. They didn't remember. And so, they muttered, murmured, grumbled, and they complained.

Seemingly small complaints about fish and cucumbers and leeks spread. Morphing into accusations that God had rescued them from Egypt just to kill them. It seemed small, but ultimately, it undermined their ability to live as God's children.

Far from being a shining light to the nations, Israel became as warped and as crooked as the nations. They forgot what God had done. They forgot why they had been rescued in the first place.

[13:17] They didn't remember how they got to where they were, nor did they remember where they were going. But Paul tweaks the image. The Philippians are pictured as blameless, shining amongst the crooked and twisted generation, pulling in imagery from Daniel 12.

And this is what Paul wants. Instead of grumbling and disputing, their imagination is captured by what they are already and what they are becoming in the future.

Blameless children of God, shining like lights and holding fast to the word of life. To grumble and dispute as God's children is like kids whining on the way to the beach.

Are we there yet? How much longer? Rather than seeing that the trip is necessary to get to the beach, we focus on the short discomforts on the way. Or imagine a wedding.

Now the people go silent. The minister says, the bridal party has arrived, please be upstanding. The music starts. The bridal party walks down the aisle. But then when it comes to the bride's turn, she grumbles and argues with her father the whole way down to meeting the groom.

[14:28] It's a ridiculous picture, isn't it? But we have so much more to look forward to than a day at the beach or a wedding. We are the children of God, shining amongst a crooked and twisted generation, holding fast to and holding out the very word of life.

So, remember how you got here. And remember where you're going. Replace grumbling and complaining with gospel perspective. But what does it look like practically?

Well, maybe it means committing some time every day to remembering what God has done that day and thanking him for it. Or maybe it means taking a to-do list and seeing it in context of what Christ has done and where he's taking us.

And just seeing how that reshapes how we see our whole to-do list. Or maybe it means for you to commit to praying to God to reorient your focus from comfort now to the kingdom work that is happening all around us.

And this brings us to Paul's final instruction of the passage and our third point. Rejoice in our gospel partnership, even as we suffer for the gospel.

[15:39] In the second half of verse 16, Paul shifts back to talking about their relationship with him. Their continued obedience becomes proof that Paul's work in Christ was not in vain.

And in verse 17, Paul even pictures their faith as the main sacrifice and his life and suffering as the accompanying drink offering being poured on top.

And a helpful answer to understand how this works is to look back at chapter 1, verse 28. It says, So when Paul hears of them standing united in the gospel, it's a sign. So when he hears of them obeying, working at their salvation, not grumbling but shining like stars, it's a sign. It's a sign that the final day of vindication will come.

A vindication of Paul's catch cry. To live, Christ. And death, gain. Vindication of Paul saying, Whatever gain I had, I count it as loss for the sake of knowing Christ.

[16:51] And so Paul rejoices in what the Philippians are doing and what he hears of them. And in verse 18 of chapter 2, he also calls on the Philippians to rejoice with him.

Because their obedience and struggle in the face of opposition and suffering is proof that they are partakers of the same grace. It's like that feeling when your team wins the championship or when Australia wins the Ashes.

Have this shared glory, a sense of unity, that we're on the same side and we're sharing this victory. But consider another layer. Imagine what it feels like not just to be a fan of the team that won, but to actually be on the team that won.

The trophy makes all the hard work and training feel worth it. If athletes can endure tough training regimes for a gold medal, if a team can make costly sacrifices for a trophy, how much more for us, the sign of our coming vindication, give us cause to rejoice?

So there's no space for comparing or complaining. For saying, I can't be happy because that other person is so gifted. Or because that other person is doing so well.

[18:09] Rather, when we see each other striving to obey, to keep a gospel perspective, it's a sign of our coming vindication.

And it's a great cause for us to rejoice with them, seeing that their obedience and their striving is a sign that we are going to be vindicated on the day of Christ.

When suffering, opposition and hardship for the gospel comes, it might feel like dying. Indeed, for Paul, it didn't just feel like dying.

Dying was a very real possibility. But it's another reminder that we share in Christ. Following his obedience to death and following his vindication.

Life, Christ, and death, gain. So, church family, remember. Remember Christ's example.

[19:08] Remember how we came to be here. Remember the one working in us. And remember where we're going. Remember so that grumbling is replaced by gospel perspective.

And having that gospel perspective. Rejoice in the confirmation of our coming vindication. How do we have the mind of Christ? Three things.

Remember. Replace. Rejoice. Rejoice.