

Shine

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] This is the AM service on the 27th of April 1997.

The preacher is Paul Barker and the sermon is entitled Shine, S-H-I-N-E. It's from Philippians chapter 2 verses 12 to 18.

Our God, we thank you for your word of life. We pray that we may hold fast to it. For Jesus' sake. Amen. When I was 10, I was in the Cub Scouts.

And as you may know, in Cub Scouts and groups like that, there is a badge system where you do various projects and tasks in order to gain badges.

The last badge I had to get was something like a woodworker's badge. And the project that my father and I decided to do was to build a bird feeder, a post with a platform and there was something on top of that, I can't quite remember what.

[1 : 3 6] And you put bird seed in it, I suppose, and the birds would come and feed from it. Now, some of you may know that I'm not very good with things like carpentry and so on.

It's a standard family joke that I don't know the difference between a chisel and a screwdriver. And I still don't, really. And I've broken so many screwdrivers trying to be chisels.

But this bird bath feeder that was made was beautiful. It was a fine piece of work. My father did a great job. I'm not sure that I did anything apart from look on and hold things at different points.

And I remember feeling a pang of guilt when I was awarded this badge, thinking, well, really, my father should get it rather than I. Raised the question of whose work was it.

I was the one who got the badge, but he was the one who did most of the work. Sometimes we can think of our Christian lives like that. To what extent is my Christian life my work?

[2 : 3 9] To what extent is it our Heavenly Father's work? When we read a passage like we've just heard from Philippians and a famous verse, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, we're inclined to think that my Christian life is my work, my energy, my effort, my achievement, my attainment.

And for some Christians, a verse like this feeds their insecurity or anxiety or doubt. Have I worked enough for God? Have I done enough for Him?

I don't know whether my work is good enough for God. How will I know what He's going to say on that final day when I stand before His Son's throne? Is my work good enough? Sometimes as Christians we're like that.

We read the thing that says fear and trembling at the end of the verse and we think, well that's exactly how I feel because I just don't think I'm good enough or that my work can be good enough for God.

How can I know? Maybe that's you to some extent. Maybe it's a bit of a caricature. But I suspect there are some of you who feel a bit like that.

[3 : 46] An insecurity or a lack of assurance that really my work is going to achieve my salvation at all. Well, if that's the case, then the passage we're looking at today is for you.

But perhaps you're different. A person who says, yes, my salvation is given to me by God. It's God's work and it's His gift to me. Yes, I'm forgiven by God's grace.

I'm accepted by Him because Jesus died and rose from the dead. And I rest assured that on that final day, because of all that God has done, my salvation will be complete.

And there's truth in that. A person like that might go on to say, quote the next verse in Philippians 2, that talks about it is God who is in you at work, to will and to work what is for His pleasure.

And so sometimes Christians say, well, let go and let God. It's God's work, I'll sit back and let God work in me to do what is His will and pleasure. Well, if that's you, again, perhaps a bit of a caricature, then this passage is for you as well.

[4 : 54] Let me give an analogy that I think explains what Paul is saying here. When he says, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it's God who's at work within you.

If I were to say to those of you who are married, work out your marriage, maybe not with fear and trembling, but work out your marriage, then I'm not implying by that that you're not married.

I'm not suggesting for one instant that what happened one, two or fifty years ago was not real. But if I were to say to you, work out your marriage, I'd be implying that once you're married, you keep working at being married.

You keep having to work at the relationship to improve it and so on. Well, that's sort of what Paul is saying here. When he says to these Christians at Philippi, work out your salvation, he's not saying that they're not saved.

He's not saying you've got to work for your salvation as though it's something you achieve or earn. But he's saying you are saved. Now work it out. Practice it. Demonstrate it.

[5 : 58] Show forth the fruits of your salvation. Or as he said back in chapter one, live a life worthy of the gospel. If it's the gospel of Jesus Christ that's brought you salvation, live a life worthy of it.

That's working out your salvation in practice, in practical living, in demonstrable ways, in our character and good works and so on. Yes, it is true that the Christian life is one of effort.

The idea of working out here is one of effort and it's our effort that's being involved. It's our struggle, our striving, if you like, to work out our own salvation.

It is something that we do and that we expend energy over. And yes, it's true that we are the ones who must persevere to the day of Christ. We are the ones who must struggle and strive to keep working out our salvation day by day, every day, until Jesus comes again and we stand before his judgment throne.

And yes, it's true that we must expend this energy and work out our salvation with fear and trembling. But not fear and trembling because we're worried about what God will say on the last day or we're worried that we've made the grade or we're worried about whether we're really saved or good enough for God.

[7 : 09] That's not the fear and trembling that's in mind here. Throughout the Old Testament, the notion of fear and trembling together occurs a number of times and it's always when God is about.

When Israel is gathered around Mount Sinai, there is thunder and lightning, cloud and this great booming voice from heaven giving the Ten Commandments and Israel was filled with fear and trembling because God was present.

And when God performed various miracles or was present in special ways in the midst of his people in the Old Testament, there was fear and trembling. Fear and trembling is when God is present.

And if Israel at different times in their history was afraid and had fear and trembling because God out there was somehow close to them, how much more us when God is in us?

That's the relationship between verses 12 and 13. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling because God is at work in you. God's presence in us is even closer than God's presence to ancient Israel or Mount Sinai or wherever.

[8 : 12] And if they had fear and trembling, how much more us when Almighty God is actually in us, working in us? It's not the fear and trembling of anxiety about whether we're going to work enough for God, but rather because God is present in us.

And it's because God is working in us that we work. It's because God is at work in us that we are to work out our own salvation. It's not the case that we let go and let God as though it's all God's work.

So I'll put my feet up and let God work in me what is for his good pleasure. But nor on the other hand is my effort and energy and striving and struggling, my working out of my salvation, purely my effort either, as though somehow by my own strength I have to do that.

But nor is it simply a case of God and me together, though that is true. It is God and us together. But the relationship is a bit more subtle. My effort, my struggle, my working out of my salvation is because God is working in me.

That's the relationship. Because God is in us as Christian people, we work out our salvation. As somebody said, God works in and we work out.

[9 : 34] That's the relationship. Because God works in, we work out our salvation. So verse 13 says, For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The enabling is the empowering. It's God's power at work in us. And it's to will and to work. That is a purposeful resolve and determination, as well as the accompanying action, to please God.

It's an ongoing process, is part of the idea here. Not one self-action. As somebody said, the more active we are in working out our salvation, the more persuaded we will be that God's power is enabling our effort.

So that's the relationship between the two. It's not just God and me working together, but me working because God is working in me. That's the relationship. And the more I strive to work out my own salvation, the more convinced we ought to be that God is at work in us to work for his good pleasure.

It's not a working out of our salvation company by anxiety or uncertainty or a lack of assurance about how we stand with God, but a confidence that we stand forgiven by God.

[10 : 58] That's why he's in us. That's why he's working in us. Because we are already his, already saved by him. And now in response to his presence in us, we work out our salvation.

So for those of you who are anxious and have doubts about your relationship with God, worried about your efforts, about whether they'll be good enough or acceptable to God, then be assured that your own efforts are a demonstration of God's power within you, God's presence within you, the fact that through Jesus' death and resurrection we are forgiven and accepted by God.

And therefore God takes up residence within us and then seeks to change us and enable us to work out our salvation. But for those of you who are resting on your salvation, who know confidently that God's accepted you and forgiven you, who are sort of coasting along in your Christian life, then this is a fairly stern warning to work out, to struggle, strive, effort.

That's the word. It's got all those sorts of connotations. To work out your salvation. Not to take it for granted. Not to be like so much of contemporary Christian complacency, but rather to take it seriously because God is in us.

And for those of you who are perhaps a bit weary of living the Christian life, a bit weary of working for God, let me encourage you not to become too settled or comfortable, not to rest on your laurels or past record or glory.

[12 : 31] For God's presence and power continues every day, no matter how old or how experienced as Christians we are, no matter how frail or how well, God's enabling power is at work in each of us if we're Christian people every day to work for his good pleasure.

The incentive, I guess, should always be there, being ready for that final day of Christ. We saw at the end of last week's passage the day when every knee would bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

That's the day for which we're getting ready, the day that is the goal of our life, if you like. And so no matter how long we've been Christians or how much we've done for Christ, we ought never to put our feet up and say, I've done it, I'm resting now.

For God is still at work within us, enabling us to will and to work for his good pleasure. And there may be some of you who are perhaps unsure about, well, what sort of things will working out my salvation demonstrate?

What will it do? Too often in modern Christianity, Christians do what they think is right or what they want to do and sometimes cloud it or excuse it by saying, I think God's called me to do this.

[13 : 51] But God's direction is clearer than we think. Very often we ignore the obvious. Too often Christians do what they think is right rather than what God says is right.

So if we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, we do so according to God's directions and commandments. It's about obedience to God.

One of the themes from last week was that Jesus, though God, obeyed the Father even unto death. And that same theme of obedience carries over into verse 12. Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, the word me is actually in the English, it's not in the Greek, so we should drop it out and take it out of the Bible.

Though you've always obeyed, not only in my presence but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation. Paul is saying, in effect, that working out your own salvation is to keep on in obedience to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's writing to people in Philippi, North Greece. He's in prison for his faith. And especially he's concerned that whilst he's absent from them, as indeed he has been for some time, he's worried that they might give up in their life of obedience and working out their salvation.

[15 : 07] So he says, but much more now in my absence. He's worried that while the cat's away, the mice will play and they'll give up persevering in Christian faith and obedience. One example of what it means for Christians to be working out their salvation with fear and trembling is given in verse 14.

Do all things without murmuring and arguing. how we do things is as important as what we do. Paul doesn't delineate here or specify what we are to do, but rather how we're to do it.

Do all things. Whatever you do, he says, do it without grumbling or murmuring and arguing. In the Old Testament, the people of God was the nation of Israel and for 40 years they lived in the wilderness.

Having been rescued and saved from Egypt and depression and through the parted waters of the Dead Sea, they spent 40 years in a wilderness desert of Sinai before entering the land that God had promised to give them.

That 40-year period is typified by murmuring and grumbling, by murmuring and arguing. And Paul, I think, here is making a deliberate allusion to that in using these words in verse 14.

[16 : 27] The generation of Israelites that were saved through the Exodus who spent up to 40 years in the wilderness perished in the wilderness because of their grumbling and murmuring and arguing.

It was their children who entered the promised land. The first generation perished. And Paul, I think, is implying here don't be like them. Don't be people who forfeit their salvation through grumbling and murmuring.

Don't be like ancient Israel who perished in the wilderness but rather work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Work it out by demonstrating it without arguing and murmuring and grumbling either to God, woe is me, God you haven't treated me very well, etc.

And amongst the body of Christian believers or the people of God as well. So often we are grumblers and complainers. Our world is full of grumbling and complaining.

If a newspaper or a radio station had a complaints column it'll be full. If it has a praise column it'll be empty. More people are quick to complain about the government or about the roads or the education or the health system than they are to praise the good things about it.

[17 : 37] Well maybe there's a lot to complain about in those respects. But sometimes as Christians that grumbling nature of the world is carried over into our own fellowship as well and into our relationship with God.

We need to be careful to practice Christian contentment in all things. Not that life is perfectly easy but rather that the things that God has given us and that are secure are far more important than any trivial complaints that we have in life.

Do all things without murmuring and arguing so that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish.

Words that are used to describe how we will be on the final day when Christ will come again. As Paul has said at the beginning of chapter 1 of Philippians and as he says in other parts of other letters that on that day of Christ we'll be pure and innocent or blameless and innocent without blemish.

But Paul is saying not now be ready for then but rather now be pure and innocent and blameless without blemish. Now become perfect. Paul recognises that yes perfection is something that's only finally attained at the last but nonetheless we ought to strive to be pure and blameless innocent without blemish in the world today.

[18 : 59] That's to be our goal even if it is a goal beyond us until Christ returns. Yes we're children of God already that's not the emphasis he's not saying become children of God you are children of God that's what God has made you through Jesus' death and resurrection but now become children of God without blemish.

Why? In part because it's working out our salvation but it also has a bigger goal in Paul's mind for he says you are to be children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation in which you shine like stars in the world.

For most of us the world is basically a good place a place of safety security comfort pleasure place of fun place of joy most of the time.

For most of us we live fairly comfortably in the world fairly happily. For most of us we think of our world and our western world and Australia in particular as a great place to be a great society with good values and so on.

We're pleased to see Christian roots in our legal system education in our social security. So when Paul describes the world as a crooked and perverse generation we may well be inclined to think ah yes but that was the ancient Greco-Roman world but now because of Christian influence the world in which we live is far from being crooked and perverse.

[20 : 40] And yet is that really the truth? Is not our world like Paul's? Is not our world even becoming more and more like the ancient Greco-Roman world?

Seems to me that it is. For our world despite all its good things is basically godless. The values of our society are not those of God.

The values of our society are immoral hedonistic selfish materialistic greedy and so on and so forth.

All of those are values that are far from God's. Paul's not saying here that every person in the world is absolutely and totally evil and wicked without any good in them or that society itself has no good in it.

Paul's not saying cut yourself off from the world but rather that as Christians we are to shine as lights in the world that the quality of our life and living ought to be so different from the values and living of our world that we are like stars in the sky bright spots in an otherwise bleak picture.

[21 : 50] Perhaps Paul's idea is that this will attract people to God that as they see the way Christians live their lives not only individually but as a community of God's people without grumbling and complaint they will be attracted to the quality of life that these Christian people are living and therefore will be attracted to the gospel and to become Christians themselves.

Our lives as Christians ought to be very different from the lives and values and priorities of those around about us in the world. So often though they influence us more than we them.

It's more than just the way we live. We are to be children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation in which we shine like stars in the world by holding fast to the word of life.

The translation here makes it another sentence but it's not originally. It's by holding fast to the word of life that we shine like stars in the world to hold fast is to grip firmly to clutch not to treat lightly or trivially the word of life.

That's the gospel, the scriptures that God has given to us from where we understand not only about life but which actually bring life. As the gospel came to us and brought us eternal life through Christ so are we to hold on to that hold firm to it never move from it as so often sadly Christians do beginning with the word of life and then putting it aside and going on to all sorts of other bizarre things.

[23 : 20] But it's not just holding fast selfishly clutching to ourselves because the word has got a second connotation to hold fast is to also hold forth to offer.

I think what Paul has in mind here that as we hold fast to the word of life knowing it but not only knowing it up here but obeying it and demonstrating it we will also offer it to other people as lights offering something to a dark world the word of life the gospel that's why as a church we're concerned to have things like our EE program and the Alpha course not only that people see the way we live but also come to hear and understand what the gospel and the good news of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for us is all about.

Paul recognises that all his ministry is in vain if the Christians of Philippi and presumably elsewhere fail to persevere in their Christian faith.

He looks forward to the day when he can boast on the day of Christ that he did not run in vain or labour in vain as verse 16 goes on to say.

Very often they're not the standards of ministry in the ecclesial circles in which sometimes I mix in meetings and so on.

[24 : 44] The success of a ministry is usually marked by how many people are coming to church. And yet in the end is that how we judge ministry? In 25 years' time when I eventually leave Holy Trinity Doncaster and the church may or may not be packed out with people does that mean a successful ministry?

No, not necessarily because what makes a successful ministry is on the day of Christ. That's the day of reckoning. Not how many people there are but whether they persevere to the end, whether they persevere in Christian faith to the day when Christ returns and are able to stand with confidence before his judgment throne.

The day of reckoning is not when I move on but the day when Christ returns. And it's the same for all Christian ministry because in one sense it's relatively easy to fill a church but are they going to be people who persevere?

It's very easy to be a Christian in good times and fair weather but what about those who persevere through difficulty, old age, frailty, loneliness or other sorts of struggles?

I'm sure you know as I know many, many people who've begun as Christians in some form or another but are no longer persevering in the faith. What about you?

[26 : 09] Are you going to be people who persevere to the end? Are you going to be people who claim the name of Christ on the day when he returns? Are you people whose Christian faith is marked by holding fast to the word of life, clutching it because you know that it is your life and will do so for the rest of your life until Christ returns?

Or are you happy to confess Christ's name so long as it's a friendly place and life's going easily but at the smallest problem or difficulty or confrontation or disappointment you drift or give up because perseverance is what counts in the end.

God's not going to look at our past records, he's not going to see that we began the race but rather whether we persevere to the end. That's what counts.

And that's what I urge of all of you. My ministry here will be absolutely nothing and meaningless if you do not persevere to the day of Jesus Christ.

And that's what matters for you as well. Not whether you begin as Christians but whether you persevere to the end. Paul is in prison about to die presumably.

[27 : 25] He sees his life not just his death but his whole life as offering a sacrifice to God. A sacrifice that's not worth making if the people to whom he's ministered are themselves not giving their lives to God.

He uses sacrificial imagery. He calls the faith of the Philippians their own sacrifice and offering to God. And he's like a drink offering. A libation is a pouring of wine or oil on the top of a sacrifice.

It's relatively unimportant. Paul's saying my sacrifice is relatively unimportant compared to your sacrifice of being Christian people who persevere to the end. But he's prepared to give up his life for the sake of the gospel indeed to rejoice in that if the Philippians continue.

So he says I'm glad and rejoice with all of you and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me because in the end what counts is what happens on the day of Christ when he returns and for that Paul is ready to rejoice even in his imprisonment and impending death because he knows that for the sake of the gospel it has been worth it.

Let's pray. Our Father when we're complacent about our Christian life we pray that this passage will stir us into action that we may work out our salvation where we are anxious and uncertain lacking assurance in our Christian life.

[28 : 52] We pray that this passage will remind us and reassure us that you are within us as Christian people enabling us to work and to will for your pleasure. Where we are tired of being Christians we pray that this will give us new vigour and life.

Where we rely on our past records we pray our God that you will help us to persevere to the end knowing that it's on that final day that day of reckoning before Christ's throne that matters and we pray this for his sake.

Amen. Amen. God bid you m■ for the and we ll not as Thank you.