

Philippians 2:12-18

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[0 : 00] Well, I wonder if there's a season that immediately comes to mind for you that was one of the happiest seasons of your life. I've been thinking this morning of the All In, the youth retreat, where 106 people are currently at Anbel Island, one of the most beautiful places in the world, basking in the sun, hearing about God's goodness, enjoying his fellowship, having a foretaste of heaven.

I was involved in our youth group for 13 years, and it was one of the happiest seasons of my life. And I was reflecting on why it was such a joyful time, and I think it was joyful because through that ministry, through that fellowship, so many people came to faith.

I don't know if you know this, but our youth ministry in that season, when I got to be there, experienced almost a mini revival. We saw people coming to know the Lord through seeing us, and as they saw us and how we loved one another and how we loved Christ, they saw Christ.

And like a moth to flame, they were attracted to follow him as well. One of our goals as a church is evangelism.

Evangelism. That's a big Christian word, and it means sharing our faith with people who don't know Jesus. And if you have one of these at home, we looked at it about four months ago, blow off the dust.

[1 : 29] Our trustees, our governing body, had four priorities. And the very first one, number one, was evangelism. We want to be a church that is known for promoting the gospel, known for sharing the gospel, known for sharing the light of Christ in our own lives.

But how do we do that? How do we go from hearing the gospel to now going out into the world to do the work that God has given us to do, to share the gospel with others?

Our text today shows us the way. How is it that we can come from being totally enraptured by the gospel by now sharing it with others and shining as lights in our various situations?

That's what Philippians 2, verses 12 to 18 is about. It's about how we hear the gospel and we are transformed by it. The gospel of Jesus Christ is unimaginably beautiful.

And last week, we got to gaze at it together. The verse right before ours, Philippians 2, 5 to 11, Paul paints a picture of the gospel personified in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, emptying himself into a human body, humbling himself by becoming obedient unto death in order to fulfill his Father's will and to win our salvation from sin.

[3 : 10] We saw how God the Father responded by exalting Jesus. That's what ascension is about. And bestowing on him the name that is above every name that all might bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

That was last week. We saw how Jesus is the way. And this week, we see what we need for the journey. This week is about following Jesus together in response to the gospel.

It's about working out our salvation in our own lives and advancing the gospel by shining as lights. In our text this week, Paul gives us two commands for what we are to do and then two images of what we are to be in response to what Jesus has done in achieving our salvation and being exalted by the Father.

So two imperatives for living and two images for being. The two imperatives or commands are both given in verse 12 of Philippians 2. Therefore, because of what Christ has done and because of what God has done in response, therefore, my beloved ones whom I love, as you've always obeyed, so now obey.

Not only in my presence, but much more in my absence and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. The first command is to obey.

[4 : 41] As Christ obeyed the Father by submitting to death on the cross, so we are now called in response to obey Christ as our Lord.

Jesus is now our master in light of what the Father has done. And so we obey him as our master. To believe in Jesus, to declare that Jesus is my Lord and my God, as all of us have just done in the Apostles' Creed, requires us to now be willing to become his servants.

You cannot say Jesus is your master if you're still living as if you're your own master. He tells us you can't have two masters. So to believe that Jesus is Lord means you believe he is your Lord.

He's your master now. And so you now obey him above all else. Your allegiance to Christ and to his gospel outweighs your allegiance to anything else.

Any desire. Any dream. Any person. Any passion. Any profession. Any idol. Any interest. We deny ourselves to follow him.

[5 : 57] We're just saying that. We present our bodies as a living sacrifice. Spending every moment of every day in every circumstance considering his pleasure and his praise above our own.

I must become less so that he may become more. We pray thy will, not my will, be done. You are my Lord and so I will obey you.

That is the first command for the Christian. Responding to Jesus. So the first command is obey. The second command is a little bit more elusive.

Paul tells us to work out our own salvation. And taken in isolation, this command can cause real confusion.

Because taken on its own, it sounds like Paul is saying that we need to work to earn our salvation. We need to work to deserve God's favor and grace.

[6 : 54] And therefore, we need to earn our salvation in Christ. That's what the term appears to mean in total isolation. But Paul doesn't write it in total isolation.

He commands this in the context of everything else he's just said. He's just spent the previous five verses telling us about the gospel. Explaining to us what Jesus has done in order to save us.

This command to work out your own salvation is not about earning our salvation. It's about applying our salvation to every area of our lives.

Paul, in essence, is saying, here is the gospel. Here's who Jesus is and what he's done. Therefore, you now work out the implications of the gospel in your own lives.

Our salvation is from God. That's what chapter 1, verse 28 of Philippians tells us explicitly. But here, Paul invites us to participate in the working out of our salvation.

[8 : 01] This is how we are to respond in light of being saved by Christ. And to absolutely avoid any confusion, Paul now clarifies in the very next verse.

He says, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Verse 13, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

See, Paul wants the Philippians to work out the reality of their salvation in their own lives. To apply the gospel in how they live and how they relate to each other. But he wants them to understand that it is God's work that is enabling their work.

It is God who is at work in you, enabling, energizing, propelling you to work for his good pleasure. Paul is referring here to the work of the Holy Spirit.

After you hear the gospel and you receive it in faith, after you proclaim Jesus Christ is Lord, Scripture shows us that Christ then gifts you with God's Holy Spirit, who begins a work within you, enabling you to now work out your own salvation and obey Christ.

[9 : 13] As you set out on the way of Christ, of following him, the Holy Spirit enters you. He abides within you, makes his home in you, and he starts from within this transformation, step by step, whereby you're made into the image of Christ.

This work of the Holy Spirit, we have a fancy word for, of course, sanctification. It means being made holy. And it's what Paul is referencing here in verse 12.

So our salvation is comprised of our justification, that's achieved by Jesus, and our sanctification, which is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Justification is the work of the Son, dying to save us, dealing with our sin, forgiving it by atoning for it, and then resurrecting to offer us eternal life in him.

Justification is exclusively Jesus' work. It's not our work. We didn't deserve it. We do not earn it. We receive justification as a gift of grace by faith in Christ.

Sanctification is the subsequent work of God the Holy Spirit, entering us and transforming us into the image of Christ, once we are justified in him.

[10 : 27] And it's this second work of salvation, the work of the Holy Spirit, that we are now invited to participate in, in verse 12. Paul puts it this way, verse 1 at the beginning of chapter 2.

He says we participate in the Spirit. We get to participate in the work of sanctification. A being made like Christ by his Spirit working within us.

So the command is to be in step with the Spirit. Participate in the work of God the Holy Spirit that he is doing within you. Obey Christ. That's what the Holy Spirit empowers us to do.

Thereby working out your own salvation, your own sanctification, alongside God who works in you. This is an invitation for all of us to become a disciple of Jesus.

To become his student, his follower. Striving to learn from Christ as our teacher and embody him as our example. And this work of discipleship, of sanctification, is fueled by God the Holy Spirit.

[11 : 29] Working within you, beside you and through you. Molding you and remaking you into the image of Christ. So those are the two imperatives of what we are to do in response to the gospel.

Obey Christ and work out your salvation empowered by God's Holy Spirit. Two commands in response to the gospel. And now two images for what the gospel invites us to be.

Paul paints two pictures to help us grasp what it looks like to obey Christ and to join the Spirit in working out the reality of our salvation together.

First he calls us children of God. Look at verse 14. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent.

Children of God without blemish. In Romans 8, Paul writes that in Christ we are children of God. Through Christ's work and through his Spirit abiding in us, we are adopted into the family of God.

[12 : 37] And since we are adopted into God's family as full members, we're invited to reflect our Heavenly Father. You are a child of God through Christ, through his indwelling Spirit.

So now live resembling your Heavenly Father. Develop the family traits of the family of God that you've been adopted into. How should children of God behave?

Here Paul gets uncomfortably practical. Look at verse 14. First Paul tells us to do all things without grumbling.

Kind of surprising that's where he would start. What a child of God looks like. Don't grumble. Grumbling is what the Israelites did when God saved them from Egypt.

Grumbling is outward skepticism. It is verbal criticism. It's complaining. And it's like a poison that contaminates the Christian community.

[13 : 42] It destroys our unity. It undercuts our leaders. It ruins our opportunity to witness to the world.

Don't grumble. Next he writes, do not question. Whereas grumbling is outward criticism, questioning is inward skepticism.

Questioning is referring to our inward thoughts. Don't assume the worst of people or be skeptical of their motives. Don't let yourself think negatively about others within the church or outside it.

The result of not grumbling nor questioning, Paul gives in verse 15, that you may be blameless. Don't grumble about others and don't give others any reason to grumble about you.

Be blameless in how you behave. Next, be innocent. Again, this is the inward reality. Whereas being blameless is the outward one.

[14 : 46] Be pure in heart is what Paul is preaching here. Sanctify your thinking. Have one mind in Christ and have his mind. As he is a child of God and has the mind of God, so too may we be children of God without blemish.

See, without blemish is where a life of obeying Christ and working out our salvation and step with the Spirit ultimately leads. The destination, the trajectory of our sanctification is that we will resemble Christ, that we will be without blemish, inside and out, that we will be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect.

That's the goal of our salvation, that we may become children of God. That is our destiny in Christ, empowered by his Spirit. Be a child of God.

That's the first image. Take care of how you behave publicly and how you think inwardly, that you may grow into that reality which is yours already in Jesus Christ. Namely, that you may become a child of God, blameless before God by the work of Christ on the cross and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit to make you holy.

This leads to the second image in verse 15. Paul continues, Be children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world.

[16 : 21] Our world needs some lights. Our world is so lost. People are living in darkness. We dwell in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation of wayward, lost, lonely, broken, hurting people.

The pandemic has exacerbated the disorder and division and darkness of individuals and society. And it's into this context, this culture, this exact moment that we are all invited, full of the Spirit, to bring Christ's light wherever we go.

God has made us and saved us and he dwells within us for such a time as this. This is our moment to shine as lights in a world of darkness.

This is why St. John's Vancouver exists. This is the work of evangelism. It's the work all of us are now called to in response to the gospel.

Evangelism is seeing yourself as a clay jar that's entrusted with carrying the light of the gospel wherever you grow, you go. Bringing Christ and his light and life to a world that's dwelling in utter darkness.

- [17 : 52] Radiate Christ's light in your office, at home, in your classroom, with your friends, your family. Shine as lights by loving your neighbors in a city that idolizes independence and isolation and is lost in loneliness.

Love people as Christ loves you and you will shine as lights. What's amazing is that living a life of discipleship, of following and obeying Christ and growing in him by his spirit, naturally, spontaneously, leads to the gospel advancing.

This is what I experienced 15 years ago in our youth group. The more serious we got in following Jesus, the more people seem to see our light and be drawn into it.

If you obey Jesus as Lord, if you work out your own salvation and participation with the Holy Spirit, you will become as children of God and you will shine as light in a dark world.

And the people around us living in deep darkness will see his light in you and they will be drawn to it. Discipleship births evangelism.

- [19 : 11] The Holy Spirit empowering us to become like Jesus leads the people in our life to see us, to see our purity and our blamelessness, to notice our lack of grumbling and skepticism so that when they look at us, they see Jesus.

People who knew you before you knew Christ see that in Christ the Holy Spirit is transforming you. You're a different person than you were before, a better person, a brighter person.

The Holy Spirit's work of transformation in us is observable and as we become like Christ we will stick out radiating his light and his love and his life.

I experienced this when I went to Regent College. I found it Regent more than any of the teaching or any of the books or any of the lectures. What attracted me to that place is the posture of the staff was one of gentleness and they radiated the light of Christ and I just wanted to be in that building.

Growing up here all of my youth leaders or Sunday school teachers or Bible study leaders they all went to Regent. They all had this constant connective tissue and it was so attractive to me because they shone as light and it drew me to pursue Jesus.

- [20 : 35] Following Jesus because of the work of the Spirit makes you holy. It sets you apart. You are different and as you live to serve another master your life will therefore take a completely different trajectory than the world around us and this different orientation towards Christ and his glory causes us to radiate the light of his gospel.

Jesus' strategy for evangelism is discipleship. Think about what he did. He took 12 rough unremarkable uneducated deeply flawed seemingly ineligible candidates and he just invited them to follow him to obey him and through his Holy Spirit to transform them into apostles into fishers of men into evangelists.

Discipleship following Jesus faithfully fuels evangelism. Discipleship fruits evangelism. This is true of all the great revivals or movements of the Holy Spirit throughout history.

The fruit of earnest discipleship is spontaneous abundant evangelism as people are drawn to Christ's light radiating through us as his Spirit works in us.

So my job here as the evangelist is not to now bring the gospel to all of Vancouver on my own. That's not what you're paying me for.

- [22 : 02] My job is to mobilize Christ's church Christ's followers working with the Holy Spirit within you to now follow him to obey him and as you do that you will shine as lights in a crooked and perverse world.

My work is to empower you to see yourselves as jars of clay called upon to carry with you the light of the gospel wherever you go. To radiate the love of Jesus through loving your neighbor seeking and serving the outcast using your opportunities and gifting to proclaim with words and actions Jesus' gospel and his goodness and his glory.

God saves us to now unleash us into a perverse and twisted generation. To show us who Jesus is to call us to obey him and work out our own salvation with his Holy Spirit empowering us enabling us to live as children of God radiating the light of the gospel into every space we enter.

I was asked this week at a pastor's retreat if there was a verse that defines my ministry my life verse and I knew instantly it's Ephesians 4 verses 11 and 12 God gave the apostles the prophets the evangelists the pastors and the teachers why?

To equip the saints that's you for the work of ministry for the building up the body of Christ. See the work of ministry is the work of every disciple of Jesus every believer every saint every person who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and is being made holy.

[23 : 40] See ministry is not my job it's your job my job is to equip you to do it so go shine as lights all of us are evangelists every disciple of Jesus every follower of him is called to shine the light of Christ to do the work of ministry for the building up the body of Christ all of us are children of God who have been gripped by the gospel of God's grace we're a community of contrast light in the darkness seeking to serve our city and shine Christ's light so the work of evangelism the work of ministry is the shared work of the entire church all of us through our unity through our humility toward each other in light of Christ and who he is and what he's done ought to now collectively seek to shine as lights in the world so work out your own salvation with God working within you and if we do we will shine as lights in the world notice those last three words shine as lights in the world we are commissioned and called to go shine Christ's light out there to go to be sent into the world can you imagine if for next Sunday we as a church took every light bulb in our entire city and brought it all here into this room and we turned it all on in the sanctuary for us to enjoy it would be wonderfully blindingly bright in here it would be total darkness out there we are called to shine as lights in the world to radiate the glory and goodness of God in the world to go to the places of deepest darkness and to banish the blackness with the light of Christ radiating out of us by the presence of the Holy Spirit within us to embody Christ and to glow his gospel in our neighborhoods in places of darkness in the spaces where institutional religion is no longer allowed to go you see you are commissioned to bring the light of the gospel into the spaces

I'm not allowed or wanted into your classrooms into your offices into government institutions and meetings shine in our universities and in our homes go be a disciple in the world follow Jesus as you live out there and if you do obeying him and working out your salvation you will shine as light and people will see the light of the gospel in you discipleship leads to evangelism because as you follow Jesus people will see God's Holy Spirit at work in you and God's Spirit brings life and light wherever he goes now I must say to do this work well to shine as lights in the world we need each other it is so hard to obey Christian to obey Jesus alone in a militant secular setting so we support each other go with each other into the world to shine as lights meet where you work for lunch with people in this parish introduce your networks out there with your friends in here this is how we shine together in the world but never forget lastly finally the source of our light which is at the beginning of verse 16 shining as lights in the world holding fast to the word of life the way we shine the light of the gospel is by always grasping the gospel holding fast never letting go of the good news of God's grace revealed in Jesus Christ this is what is needed for our unity in Christ through our suffering for Christ for humility and obedience like Christ is to hold fast to the word of life because only in God's word do we find the words that bring eternal life only there do we find the light of the gospel amidst a world of darkness so we never let go of these words they're a lamp to our feet a light to our path they are the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes we have nothing to share no light to shine without the good news of the word of life so my beloved and you are to me

I love this community my beloved obey Christ and work out your own salvation figure out how God is inviting you today to work alongside his work to bring about your sanctification obey Jesus as your Lord embody your identity as a beloved blameless child of God and shine his light amidst a dark world grasping the word of life and now Father send us out into the world to do the work you have given us to do may your kingdom come may your will be done that Christ may be glorified Amen Amen Let's go

Amen Let's go