

How Life Is To Be Lived

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[0 : 00] that portrays who Jesus is. And it portrays it very clearly in chapter 2 when it says, look at it, because of course this is one of the high watermarks of the New Testament epistles.

Have this mind among yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, and this is the picture they give of him. Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, he emptied himself, he took the form of a servant, being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

And God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, the glory of God the Father.

It's a very powerful picture. It's the kind of picture that all of you should have permanently engraved in your mind.

It's the kind of picture that should be at your fingertips, at the tip of your tongue, all the time. That picture which Paul gives of the apostolic message concerning the person of Jesus Christ, who he was, who he became, the death he suffered, the resurrection he became subject to, and the exaltation and the ultimate reality when everything, on earth and under the earth, every tongue, shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

[2 : 09] So it goes way back into history. It comes to the time of the crucifixion. It goes beyond time into eternity. And from eternity, it portrays to us the final climactic moment of time.

That's the picture. The operative words are, watch this carefully, in verse 8, became obedient.

You all remember those, eh? Became obedient. Now what happens? Now Paul says, having given you that picture, he says, verse 12, therefore, now that's consistent all through the New Testament letters, a huge presentation of doctrine concerning the character and person of God and the work and ministry of Christ and the person and viability of the Holy Spirit and having presented you with that powerful picture, then, therefore, that's what you've got to do.

When you see that picture, then you've got to respond to it. Most of us think you can strip the picture away and just go on with the wherefores, but you can't. And that's what happens to Christianity.

People forget what came before the wherefores. They don't give you or the therefore. They don't give you the story of what happened before. They just tell you what happens afterwards and try and make you behave according to that.

[3 : 47] And that doesn't work. Because if you haven't got the picture, the therefore doesn't mean anything. And then there is a lovely touch. Therefore, my beloved, and Paul walks up and this is where it works with our heart.

He says to them, therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now not in...

So now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. The thing that you have learned, the thing that has characterized your life since the apostolic picture of the life, death, and resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Jesus Christ has been put before you, you have become obedient to that faith that in Christ the purpose of God has been made known and you, by faith, have become obedient to it.

You have become obedient to that. That's what your life is all about. And Paul says, when I was there with you, you were obedient to it. If I'm not there with you, you're still required to be obedient to it because you're not being obedient to me, Paul, you're being obedient to him before whom every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord.

That's who you'll be obedient to. Therefore, my beloved brethren, as you have obeyed in my absence, in my presence, so now, in my absence, carry on that obedience because it's obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord in your life.

[5 : 56] That's what you're to do. That's what the whole of your life is about. Obedience to Jesus Christ as he is presented to you in the Apostolic Witness.

Paul has portrayed for us in the earlier part of the text. So he says, you've done it, now, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Now, what he's saying to you is he's taking them all together. There'll be a brief pause in this sermon. Will you stand up and greet one another in Christ's name?

Would you do that just for a purpose? I mean, first, before he's spying there, I mean, I love him. I wish he's in the lip and I believe that all in his foot are so clean and he's in the arms between two in the suggestions Now, the reason that I ask you to do that is because, you can sit down now, is because I want you to see that what Paul is saying is that the salvation that they are to work out is not something that you come here for privately tonight, to grab hold of, put in your pocket, and go home.

It's something that belongs to all of you. And that salvation which you're to work out is the salvation which you work out in practical relationship, loving relationship to one another.

[7 : 47] It's work out the salvation that belongs to you as the church in this place at this time. Now, I've argued with those who give leadership to this Sunday evening service for some time that you as a group should come together as a congregation, that you should come to recognize yourself, be aware that you are a congregation.

And they point out to me, Harry, you're being quite ridiculous because people who come here on Sunday evening come for private and personal reasons from all sorts of different places with all sorts of different agendas and all sorts of different motivations.

And they're doing their own thing. Don't try and lay that on them. So I'm going to try and lay that on you. I know there's a reality to that.

And you can take this back to the congregation you do belong to if you don't belong here. But you've got to belong somewhere. Because you have to, in that congregation, work out your salvation.

That's what's happening. That's the thing you have to do. It's not the private pursuit of holiness.

[9 : 05] It's working out the salvation that belongs to you. In fact, in the face of the fact that the most obstinate, stubborn, isolated, alienated, difficult to get along with massive people gather here at 7.15 on Sunday night.

Nevertheless, that group of people have to, in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, to work out the salvation which belongs to them all.

It's an inheritance which has been given. It's not unlike airlifting food into Ethiopia. Now, we all know in the blasé and sophisticated West that the airline pilot gets some, and the truck drivers get some, and the politicians get some, and people drop it off at their Uncle Ned's and their Aunt Idas, and all those kinds of things.

And the food never gets through to the people that it belongs to. You know, that the distribution of food is so corrupted by greed and politics and all sorts of things that it never gets to the people for whom it was meant.

That's what happens to our salvation, is that it gets so caught up in bad relationships between people that it's never delivered.

[10 : 23] So, the salvation which belongs to us, we have never worked out and appropriated because it belongs to us. And one of the reasons that we haven't done that is because we fail to recognize, Paul says, if you look at it, you fail to recognize that God is at work in you to will and to work for his good pleasure.

We don't see that happening. We have a staff meeting on Thursday morning to which nobody ever comes. That's a little bitterness coming up from me, but it's not serious.

People do come. But the function of that meeting, as far as I am concerned, has come into focus with this verse.

The reason we come together is to seek by encouraging one another to become aware of the fact that God is at work in us to will and to do his good purpose.

That's what we want to see. We see enough of our work and our organizing and our energy and our arguments and our abilities and all the things that we do. But the thing that we have to become aware of if we're really interested in the goal of working out our salvation in fear and trembling, we've got to become conscious of the fact that God is at work in you.

[11 : 56] To will, wonderful that he puts that first, isn't it? Because most people consider that Christianity is doing what you don't want to do.

That's how they define Christianity. I'm not ready yet to do what I don't want to do just because I call myself a Christian. So I won't call myself a Christian and I don't have to want to do it.

The first thing that God does for us is to make us want to do it. If you're living Christianity because you know you don't want to, well then, save your energy. You're wasting your time.

Because God works in you to will and work at his good pleasure. And it's becoming aware of that and being aware of how our relationships to one another, the enterprises we undertake, the things we do, all of that is just an outward manifestation of the primary reality by which a church can hold together and by which alone the church can hold together.

And that is by the continuing process of God being at work among you, as Paul says, to will and to work for his good purpose.

[13 : 09] And why doesn't that happen? The reason it doesn't happen is because when you bring a lot of fairly pious and idealistic moral achievers together, which is a general description for us, of which I know there are some violent exceptions, I think, what happens when you bring that group together is immediately you get a process which is as old as the Old Testament.

There are grumblings and questions. And on it goes, endlessly into the night, murmuring, grumbling.

There's a lovely Greek word if you know anybody who can really help you with it, you should look at it. The word for grumbling and questioning and litigation and fights and arguments all sorts of things that dissension.

We can't make up our mind about this. The decision process is broken down with regard to this. We've got two parties with two different ideas about this. And all this comes into the church all the time so that these grumblings and questionings become the very thing that stand in the way of working out our salvation and being aware of how God is at work in you both to will and to work for his good passion.

He says, get all that out of the way in order that you may be what you are. The blameless and innocent children of God. You know how you can go to the refrigerator after you haven't been to it for a week or so and there's a lovely fresh loaf of bread with just a touch of mildew wine.

[15 : 06] And more abstinence people among us so the whole thing out. Well, that's what blameless means. It means that you're not a mildew community. There isn't an infectious contagion that has taken place among you as a group which ultimately will destroy the whole group.

That infection, that spiritual infection has not taken place. And it's not to take place. You are to be blameless. You're not only to be blameless, it says you are to be innocent.

That means you are to be virginal, unalloyed, undiluted. Those two things.

That's what, that's what, that's the place we have to come to. That you, there be no grumbling or questioning, but you may be blameless and innocent children of God.

the reason that we read Deuteronomy 32 tonight is because it's a picture of the children of God. A wonderful picture of the community of Christ's church as the children of God wandering in the wilderness and yet, nevertheless, they are to be the children of God.

[16 : 30] Those through whom God wants to reveal himself to the rest of our society, he takes the children of God, he wants them not to grumble, but to be blameless and innocent, without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

That's the description of the world in which we have to live our lives. So you see a world which is crooked and perverse, and you see the children of God who are blameless and innocent, and you see that God's purpose is through those people to reveal to the perverse and crooked world something very important.

Because he says, in that world, you shine as light in the world. light in darkness. That light is not you or me, but it's us as a community taking the agenda that belongs to the world and by which the world is constantly defeated and constantly breaks down and constantly goes astray and constantly becomes infected and alloyed and diluted so that it no longer represents anything which is viable as a community and that rot always sets in and takes over.

But there is a community in the midst which is demonstrating the reality of God at work among you to will and to work his good purpose. And in that community, you begin to see light in the midst of the human darkness of this crooked and perverse world.

That's why it's important for us to work out this salvation. Not for the sort of eternal security of our own souls, but because this is to be the light for the world as to what human life is all about and how it's meant to be lived and what are the end goals of it and what are the purposes of it.

[18 : 48] So, that's what this community of the children of God is to do. In verse 16, it says you're to hold fast the word of life.

In a perverse and crooked world, there is a process of faith which is leading to life.

There is a process of fear which is leading to death. And that's what happens in a world which is living in fear of death.

And that's a profound motivator. We're going to be dead very soon. So, whatever you're going to do, do it now. And don't let anything get in your way. That's how fear of death motivates people.

Don't obey the laws. Don't do anything. Just do what you've got to do in order to satisfy you because you are under the fear of death.

[19 : 50] And when death comes, it's all over. So if there's going to be any reality, it better be here and it better be now. That's why the fear of death is such a powerful motivator.

I think I've told you before that Anthony Bloom in his book on this present student generation, this present society, says that our terrible preoccupation with sexuality is because of our profound fear of death.

I think it's contemplating your right in moments as you travel through this world of our sin. I think it's a very powerful statement.

So as the children of God, to shine as lights, holding fast the word of life, inviting people, saying, there is an option, there is a choice.

When I was first introduced to young life by somebody, I said, our fundamental thing that we have to do is to go into the high school and tell them that where they are wrapped up in sex and drugs and all the things that kids get involved in, the contemplation of suicide, this Jean Thomas was saying this morning, our job is to go in and say, hey, there's an option.

[21 : 20] You can make a choice. that's the function of the community who have worked out their salvation so that people can come along and see what it is and it will represent to them the word of life, the word which brings life.

Well, he goes on from there to say, so that in the day of Christ, Christ, you see what he does, and I think that's what Christians have to do.

The really important day is the day of Christ. That's the really significant day. What day is that? Well, if you want to know what day that is, look ahead again, look above where it says what it is.

God has exalted him and bestowed on him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God.

Well, that's what will be happening on the day of Christ. There will be no question of who is Lord. There won't be any arguments about that any longer.

[22 : 45] Are you right to do this? Are you right to do that? Should you invest in this or should you invest in that? How should you behave under these circumstances? How should you behave? That's the kind of thing that we have to do in the course of our earthly pilgrimage, but we make those choices ultimately in terms of how they will appear on the day of Christ.

And we're up against a world which says most of your decisions have to be made pragmatically in view of the circumstances that surround you at the moment. what Paul is saying is no, no, that's not how you do it.

The way you do it is you live in recognition that what you're doing will count for something on the day of Christ. If it doesn't count for anything on that day, it doesn't count for anything now.

And that's what Paul means when he says on the day of Christ, I want to be proud of you. that I didn't run all those miles in vain that it wasn't.

I didn't work and work and work in vain. I worked in faith, believing in the salvation which belongs to you and which you can see God working in you to accomplish the God works in you to will and to do his purpose.

[24 : 25] That's what God is doing and that's what I ran about, that's what I worked at, that's what I kept going at. In spite of the fact that most of the time, 99.9% of the time, it looks like a lost cause.

will be the only thing that comes. And Paul says, I don't care what people think now about the foolishness of what I'm doing.

I don't care how ridiculous they think it is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. I don't care about those things. I travel on, I work on, because I know that in the day of Christ, I won't be ashamed because what I have done, what I have given my life to will count.

And that's why he says to you, beloved, as you have obeyed, first as Christ became obedient. So you, in becoming disciples of Jesus Christ, become obedient to him.

And in that obedience you go on. And you go on knowing that in the day of Christ, you will not be ashamed.

[25 : 50] And he says, even if I am not, even if I am to be poured out as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, a wonderful picture, of a community in obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord, working out their salvation in fear and trembling, living by the constant awareness of the reality that God is at work among them to will and to do his good purpose, that that, in a sense, becomes an offering of their faith.

God is just as in the great temple in Jerusalem. The whole of the life of the community was centered around the temple, and the temple was centered around the altar, and at the altar the sacrifices were continuing to be made, and the fire and the smoke from the altar was continued to be seen throughout the whole of the city.

That was the central activity that was going on, that a sacrifice was being made to God, and so Paul says, you as a community have at your center a sacrifice of faith that is being made.

That is, you are sacrificing the things that maybe the world around you offers, in order that in obedience to Jesus Christ, you present to God this sacrifice of loving response to the God who, in Christ, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation and being found in form as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross, and we follow that pattern of obedience, and that pattern of obedience is the way we work out our salvation, and our salvation forms, as it were, the altar and the sacrifice and Paul says, if my life counts for nothing else but you, if my life blood is poured out with you and the sacrifice that you're making in working out your salvation, then I've got no complaints at all.

Paul says, I'm glad and I rejoice just to be a part of that. I wouldn't want anything more. nothing else would be required to satisfy me.

[28 : 27] Paul says, if that's to happen, and if I die, because he's writing from prison, and the possibility of his death is a daily consideration for him, he says, even if that's the case, I'm glad and rejoice with you all, and likewise youth, plodding on as you are, living in the obedience of faith, working by faith towards the day of Christ, being subjected to the ridicule as it may be for you to profess your faith in Christ, but you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Now, there it is. That's what I think, at least in part, I think that's what Philippians 2, 12 to 18 is saying.

And it's saying it to us, not just to you to take home privately for your meditations this week, but for you in relationship to one another, and to the community of Christ's people to whom you belong, and with whom you are to work out your salvation, with fear and trembling, because it's so desperately important, not blasé and indifferent, which so often characterizes us, but in fear and trembling, to work it out in the consciousness that God is at work in you, in the midst of this process, to will and to do his good pleasure, his purposes among you.

salvation. And so the whole ministry we have with one another, and among one another, and for one another, and in relationship to one another, and in our relationship to the world around us, is working out our salvation.

Salvation is a hard word. I don't particularly like it, because it's so desperately religious, and yet its application is far bigger than that.

[30 : 54] And so I really want you to think about it.

I'd love you to come and talk to me about it in the coffee hour that follows, but we can discuss it if you like. But it seems important, and I pray that God will give us some sense of a calling to hear this.

Wherefore, my beloved, as you have obeyed, go on obeying, because you have good reasons. Amen.