

Joy in Obedience

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[0 : 00] Well, if I were to say to you, twinkle, twinkle, little star, you would probably say how I wonder what you are up above the world so high like a diamond in the sky.

Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are. You'd be glad I'm singing it. Sorry, I'm not singing it, but I'm just repeating it to you. I'm not going to sing it actually either.

And that is probably one of the most popular nursery rhymes that the world has ever heard. But do you know it's actually got five verses, but we only tend to stick with the first one.

I mention this because in a reading, you may have noticed that the Apostle Paul in Philippians chapter 2 and verse 15 tells the Philippian believers to shine like stars.

What he's saying is Christians should shine like lights in this dark world. And over the past couple of weeks, we are in no doubt that this world is a dark place.

[0 : 57] And so what he's saying is followers of Jesus should live distinctively different lives. Not distinctive in the sense of being weird or odd, but distinctive in an attractive kind of way, in a way that light shines into darkness and makes it better.

And Paul is saying if people look at Christians and see how they're living, there's a sense in which they should be forced to ask, how I wonder what you are? How, why are you living this kind of life? What produces this life you are living?

And so how does this happen? How do people shine like stars in a dark world? Well, Paul says it comes from working out the salvation that God has given to us, working it out in our lives. That's what he says in verse 12 and 13. So essentially, because of what Jesus Christ has done for us, Paul urges us to work out our salvation motivated by the reality that God himself is at work in us. And that's really the thrust of Philippians chapter 2, verse 12 to 18, as Paul encourages the Philippian believers to live for Jesus in this world. So I'd like us this afternoon to think about this passage under three headings that basically follow the text.

The first is work out, verse 12 and 13. The second is live out, verse 14, 15, 16. And the third is pour out, verse 17 and 18.

[2 : 36] Work out, live out, pour out. First, work out, verse 12 and 13. Let's just think for a moment, what's the context for Paul's command here to tell the Philippians how they should be living? Well, he says in verse 12, So he starts with the word therefore because he's basing what he is just about to say on what he has already just said.

Well, what did he just say? Well, he's just given us this magnificent portrait of Jesus Christ in chapter 2, verse 1 to 11. Jesus humiliated and Jesus exulted. So he's pointed to Jesus as the supreme example of humility so that the Philippians know how to behave in their relationships with each other.

And so on the basis of Christ's example, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, death on a cross. Paul's chapter 2, verse 8. Paul's now saying, okay, Philippians, you've seen what Jesus Christ has done for you and how he has been obedient.

Now you need to be obedient by working out your salvation, the salvation God has given to you. Because salvation is the transformation of our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

So if somebody professes to be a Christian, they should become and look more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. So if you're here today and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, you should be able to look at Christians and see reflected in their lives what Jesus was like in his life.

[4 : 24] But notice how Paul addresses the Philippians in verse 12. He calls them my dear friends or he, better translation, would be calling them my beloved. It's a kind of term of special affection.

It's how you would talk about your family, calling them your loved ones. That's the kind of relationship that Paul has with these Christians in Philippi. He's their pastor and so he loves

them.

And he longs for them to grow in their faith and to become more like the Lord Jesus. So yes, God began a good work in them. He says that in chapter 1 verse 6.

But God hasn't finished yet. So they're on the course, but they haven't yet graduated. And so Paul here makes it clear what they and we have got to do by saying halfway through verse 12 and into verse 13.

So the command here is to work out your salvation.

[5 : 30] Well, what does that mean? Well, it's important to understand what Paul is not saying here. He's not saying that you've got to work in order to obtain your salvation.

As if doing lots of good works, being nice, giving to charity, doing good things, therefore merits our salvation. So if we kind of get over 50% and we're far better than we are, far worse, then God owes us salvation somehow.

He's saying, no, you don't work for your salvation. And he's not saying also that when you have your salvation, it's basically up to you to keep it. As if God's done his bit and God passes us the ball, as it were, and says, don't drop the ball.

Just keep running in your own strength and hopefully you'll make it to the try line, the finish line.

You'll get your salvation in the end. Well, he's not saying anything like this here.

He's not saying that you can work for your salvation because none of us can. None of us could ever be good enough. None of us could ever do enough to receive God's salvation.

[6 : 39] But nor is salvation something that simply goes over our heads and has no impact on our day-to-day lives. And so we work out the salvation we've been given from God because we are saved people.

So we are working out what God has already worked in us so that our salvation transforms every aspect of our lives, our being.

For the mind of Christ, as he says in chapter 2, verse 5, For the mind of Christ is reproduced in us and it changes us so that everything about us becomes more and more like Jesus Christ.

Because we can't have Jesus as our Savior without having Jesus as our Lord. And when he is our Lord, then we must bow to his authority and live in his way.

Because he must be Lord of all if he is to be Lord at all. So Paul is saying here we should respond to the salvation that is ours by working it out into every sphere of our existence.

[7 : 49] He says we do this with fear and trembling because God is already at work in us to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. So being a Christian is basically a lifelong process of obeying God by working out in our lives what God is working in us.

So that we increasingly become more and more and more what God wants us to be, what God calls us to be. So God does his work, but we have work to do as well.

Not in our own strength, of course, but as God's power works in us for his good pleasure. Because there's a connection between God's sovereignty, God's power, God's might, and human responsibility.

So of God's work in our salvation and our responsibility for how we should live as a believer. So if you look down at your Bible, verse 12, that's our human responsibility.

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. And then if you look at verse 13, there is God's sovereignty for it is God who works in you.

[9 : 03] So knowing that God is working in us is never a disincentive for our efforts. It is actually our incentive to keep on obeying him, to keep going.

So our salvation is something that God does for us and something that God does in us. It happens outside of us.

So God is the author of our salvation and it happens inside of us. So God is writing the story of our salvation as he transforms each aspect of our lives.

What is the transformation? Well, it transforms our thinking. Our salvation does. It transforms our attitudes. It transforms our desires, our wills, our feelings.

And so working out our salvation happens in everything that we say and everything that we do.

Theologians often speak about the New Testament having three tenses of salvation.

[10 : 05] And so past tense is past tense, present tense, future tense. So past tense is we have been saved. That's our justification. Present tense is we are being saved.

That's our sanctification. And future tense is we will finally be saved. And that's our glorification. And so what Paul is talking about here is the present tense of our salvation, which is our sanctification. We're becoming more and more and more like Jesus. We are being saved. And so he's saying to the Philippians, well, here's how you're to live out a saved life.

So let me just try and illustrate this by using a simple illustration. Just say that you get a new job. The employer gives the job to you.

And so you sign the contract. And you start work. It's a Monday morning, 8 a.m. And you're going about your job. And you work through the week. You come home at the weekend. And your friends ask you, how's your new job going?

[11 : 09] Getting on okay? Maybe you have your name on a door on your office. And your job title is also on the door. If not, maybe you've just got a lanyard.

And it's got your name and your mugshot and your job title. But you know that there's more to your job than just all of that. Yes, the job is yours.

You know it's yours. The employer knows it's yours. Your friends know it's yours. But you've actually got work to do in your job. You've got to show up every day.

You've got to fulfill your responsibilities. You've got to produce the results that are expected of you. You've got to work your job day in and day out to prove in a sense that you're worthy of that job title that is on your office door.

And it's the same for the Christian. We don't work for our salvation. We've been given it as a gift. God is gracious and loving.

[12 : 13] He's given us this salvation that is ours. It can't be taken away. And yet it's not that God works and we don't work.

It's that God, by his spirit, enters our lives. He invades them, if you like, and enables us to work out our salvation day by day by day into every dimension of our being.

For now that we have been saved, well, we continue to live a saved life. And that saved life is seen in the change in our speech, the change in our behavior, the change in our habits, where we're becoming less like what we used to be, far away from God.

And we're becoming like the Lord Jesus in what we do and in what we say. And so he's saying, obey God and work out your salvation as he is working in you.

Well, what does this look like? So first, work out. Second, live out. It looks like what he says there in verse 14 to 16. He goes on to explain how we're to live out our lives as God's children.

[13 : 25] He shows us what working out our salvation with fear and trembling looks like. Of course, Paul's word is a big application to the Philippian Christians.

And so he starts here with, I believe it's an application to us, but he starts with a negative before moving on to the positive. So first of all, the negative there in verse 14, he says, do everything without grumbling or arguing.

Now, why would Paul say that to the Philippian church? Any ideas why he'd need to say do everything without grumbling or arguing?

Well, obviously, because he needs to. Clearly, there were people grumbling and arguing with each other in the church. At least some of them were.

Complaining, moaning, disputing. And it is shameful behavior in the church. In fact, what Paul does here is he uses language that's reminiscent of God's people Israel in the Exodus, who were famous for their grumbling and moaning and complaining.

[14 : 35] Where soon after God had rescued them from their slavery in Egypt, they started to grumble and complain in the desert. And what were they grumbling and complaining about? They were moaning about their food.

Grumbling to Moses, grumbling to Aaron. In reality, it wasn't Moses and Aaron they were grumbling to. They were grumbling against the Lord. And it was pathetic, given all that God had done for them. That's why Paul here is highlighting this disgraceful behavior. Because their moaning was a sign of their deep ingratitude towards God.

And it was bang out of order for God's people to complain, grumble and argue then, just as it is today. Why? Well, it just shows a complete lack of gratitude for all that God has done for us.

If we're negative all the time, if we're grumbling all the time, it really shows that we don't trust God. That God is sovereign and God knows what he's doing.

[15 : 44] We tend to think, well, God's not really arranged things that suit me or my preferences or my purposes. And it's in such sharp contrast to what Paul's been saying about Jesus.

And the humiliation of Jesus Christ, who never once complained about his situation, did he? And that's why grumbling and arguing are out of order, if we have the mind of Christ.

And so when we do grumble or argue, or even if grumbling or complaining just happens to be our disposition, which it shouldn't be, we might not see it, but everybody else will see it, it just shows that we are nothing like Jesus.

And it's pathetic. I reckon I have sadly encountered more grumbling in the church than I have in any other sphere of life. But it's so wrong, isn't it?

Grumbling, complaining, arguing should never characterize us if we claim to be a follower of Jesus. That's not what we should be known for.

[16 : 57] Because as Paul relates the grumbling of the Israelites to that of the Philippians, he seems to be reminded of some events in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy chapter 31 and 32.

And there's a footnote about this. And in those chapters in Deuteronomy, Moses speaks about the sinful behavior of the Israelites. And he quotes here a phrase that's used negatively of the Israelites in Deuteronomy, but he flips it around and he applies it positively to the Philippians.

There in verse 15, So that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then verse 16, Sorry, Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.

So Paul's call here to the Philippians and to us is to become blameless and pure children of God. Because a child of God shows how they should live God's way. Live in a way that is in keeping with their identity.

[18 : 08] In other words, we've got to grow and become what we already are. Which means reflecting the family likeness. Displaying the family characteristics.

Not to be part of a warped and crooked generation. Not like those who live like they aren't children of God. But to live in a radically different way in this dark world.

And so he's saying you should be seeking to be blameless and pure in every situation. Well, what does that look like? It should be in our conversations. It should be in our motivation.

It should be in our emails, in our relationships. When we're at work and we're on our own. Because working out our salvation impacts every single detail of our lives.

It is a bearing on what we do and don't do. And so it requires grace-driven effort through the help of the Holy Spirit. I guess you know if you ever go to the gym that any kind of fitness workout requires effort.

[19 : 23] You don't get into shape just by sitting around. You've got to keep working out. And it's not always easy. It requires running further, lifting heavier and heavier weights.

Or whatever it is. And of course, no Christian ever reaches perfection in this life. Just like nobody can ever have the perfect body. No matter how many hours they spend at the gym.

Sorry to disappoint you. But that doesn't mean we give up, does it? Or we give in. And so Paul's encouragement is that we continue to work out our salvation. For God works in us to change us into what we should be.

So that as children of God, verse 16, we will shine like stars in the sky as we hold firmly to the word of life. Now Paul's speaking here about being a witness to Jesus in a dark world.

And his words here really echo what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount about being light in the world. He said, you're the light of the world. And he said, let your light shine before others.

[20 : 30] And so as we work out our salvation, we shine like stars in the sky as we hold out and hold on to the word of life.

And Paul's saying, so as we avoid the negative and pursue the positive, then we can become a powerful witness to Jesus in this world.

And often the darker the world, whether it's school, university, work, sports team, society in general, then the brighter God's people will shine out when they live for him.

And so the challenge for us is, well, how do people see you and me if we profess to be a Christian? Are we shining in such a way that people are drawn to God?

Does our lifestyle attract people to Jesus or does it cause them to repel against him? Like me, I'm sure you've heard many testimonies of people who've come to faith through the brightly shining, attractive life of a Christian friend or a Christian colleague at work.

[21 : 48] Because I think people want to know whether what Christians believe actually makes any difference to their lives. They want to see whether Christianity works to help them discover whether it's true.

And Christians are the witness to see whether that is the case. And of course it does work because it's true. And so that should be reflected in the lives of those who follow Jesus.

They should display positively the difference that Jesus makes in a person's life. Because if Jesus doesn't change people for the better and the church doesn't represent that, then why bother with Jesus at all?

If Jesus only produces people who are always grumbling and arguing and moaning and complaining, then what is the point of investigating Jesus any further?

So Paul wants the Philippians to shine. And so as he says in verse 16, I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.

[22 : 51] So what does he mean? Well, he's saying he wants to be proud of the Philippian Christians when Jesus returns. Because if they work out their salvation and if they live out their salvation, then Paul's efforts that he's devoted to teaching them and to encouraging them, all of those efforts won't be wasted.

So when Jesus comes to judge, he wants to see the Philippians there who began well in their faith and who kept going, who kept growing and becoming more like Jesus.

And he says that's what would make him proud. He'd be able to boast in them because they had lived in obedience to God. But that's not all. So first, work out.

Second, live out. Thirdly and finally, pour out. There in verse 17 and 18. Why pour out? Well, let's read those verses. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. Paul's saying here that he is willing to have his life poured out for the Philippians.

[24 : 07] He'd be glad to do this for the sake of their faith. He's using a metaphor here when he speaks of being poured out like a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of their faith.

What he's talking about is a practice in the Old Testament where the drink offering or the libation, as it was called, was poured out onto the main animal sacrifice.

And so Paul's saying the main sacrifice is the sacrificial offering of the Philippians' faith. And he's saying he's prepared to be poured out like a drink offering on top of their sacrifice.

Essentially, he's saying he's glad to pour himself out, to expend his energy, even his life, in the service of Jesus Christ.

And so as we close, that is basically what is at the heart of following Jesus. It is pouring out our lives in sacrificial service to the one who's already poured out his life for us.

[25 : 12] Because if we want to follow a crucified Lord who sacrificed himself for us, means that we will need to have the same mind as Christ Jesus and be willing to pour out our lives in sacrificial service to him.

And that is the only way that we will shine brightly in the darkness of this world. When our life is of such a quality that we display God's supernatural work, his transformative power.

His salvation worked out in a life that used to be this, but now is this. Used to be a mess, but now it's still a mess.

But it's seeking to change because Jesus is working in that life. The Christian church, in a sense, should showcase the transformative power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We should be people, if we belong to church, this church, we should be people who are becoming more like Jesus. Because at the end of the day, that is what our world desperately needs.

[26 : 28] Because it has been so clear over the past couple of weeks that we live in a world that is violent, and we live in disturbing times where it feels as if the darkness is closing in, and hatred has just become the new normal, where you just say what you want to say, you do what you want to do, you don't care about anyone else, and you just don't mind what the consequences of your actions are.

You just do what you want to do. And so what is the answer to living in a world like this? Well, the answer is Christ himself, because people need Jesus.

We need Jesus to stop the hatred, which can bubble up in all of our hearts, and to produce love in our hearts instead. And it's only the salvation of Jesus that can transform people to be like this from

that.

Because his sacrificial death on the cross brings light, it brings love, it brings life to individual people like you and me, but also to our world.

And so Jesus is not only our only hope, he is this world's only hope. No one or nothing else can save us from the mess that we're in.

[27 : 50] Only in Jesus do we become what we were made to be as human beings. So can I just ask you today, do you see this?

If you don't know Jesus, then surely you recognize that our lives, your life, and this world aren't what they should be. They aren't what we would want them to be.

And it's because we desperately need salvation in Jesus Christ, which is what God offers to each and every one of us. And so if you don't know Jesus, then you should receive Jesus as your Savior and follow him as your Lord.

Because when we receive Jesus, then God by his Spirit not only begins to transform our lives, to live a better way, to shine out in the darkness, but he also forgives us when we fail.

And we do. And so if you do follow Jesus, then the message is continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Live your life for the God who made you and loves you and is working in you for his good pleasure.

[29 : 06] And that working out is going to involve sacrifice, it is going to involve service, and it will need grace-fueled obedience every single day.

But when we see how Jesus poured out his life and sacrificed himself for us, then there's no other way to live than the way of Jesus.

So follow him today and every day by living his way. Let's pray. Let's pray.