



PHILIPPIANS: LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS

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Phillipians 2:12-18:

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.

Hello family! Before we dive into this passage, let's take a moment and pray. Father, we're grateful for the texts that we've just heard read, and for the beauty of Christ, and all he's done, and all that he's doing in us and the fact that you are still working in our lives right now. We pray, as we look at this text, that you continue to do the work of saving us and changing us for your namesake, Jesus, and we pray. Amen.

Paul begins verse 12 with "Therefore". Before we go any further, a good thing to do whenever you're reading your Bibles, whenever ever you see the word, "therefore" you want to pause and say, "What is it there for?" And in this case, we just heard Paul rehearse this, hymn, this song, that the church was very familiar with, as he reminded

people to consider others more significant than themselves. To consider others' interests, not just your own. He goes into this, hymn saying, Keep this mind in you, which is also yours in Christ Jesus (verse 6 of chapter 2), who though he was in the form of God, did not account, did not count equality with God, something to be grasped or (to be held onto or exploited for his own purpose). But instead he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name. So 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 the Father.

See, Paul knows that this hymn provides both the motivation for what he's about to call them to do, as well as the very means to enable them to do it. However, before Paul commands them to do something, he commends them. He, he exhorts, but before he exhorts them as to what to do, he wants to encourage them first. This is a really good word for us. And I think especially parents with your kids, but leaders with your teams, teachers, with your students, any of us in friendship who are trying to influence each other towards obedience. It's always good to start with commending with encouragement.

So Paul says, My beloved, as you have always obeyed... see, commends their identity and their behavior. My beloved. Later he's going to remind them that they are the children of God. That they are the lights in a dark world. And so Paul wants to remind them of their identity, what God has already done and is doing, so that their confidence, and even their motivation, is not based on them doing something so God will love them, but doing something because God already does.

And so I want to just stop and ask us, as we think about this present situation that we're in, how do we see each other? How do we perceive the other? And I'm thinking of different races, I'm thinking of different categories of socioeconomic strata that we all find ourselves in, people who see life differently, politically, or, with different ethics or values, and even different religious convictions. How do we see each other right now? Because the reality is how you perceive one another will lead you to how you're going to then work out this very text that we're going to read. So I want you to just pause for a moment and ask that question. What do we need to remember is true of one another in this moment right now?

After Paul reminds them of how he sees them and what is true of them, he then exhorts them. He says this, So now not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence. See, Paul wants to say to them in light of Christ humility, that led him to obey the Father, giving up his life for us, I want you to continue to obey. Not because I'm with you, and somehow I supply some kind of pressure that you feel, but because Jesus is with you. And Jesus sees you. And Jesus says, we're going to find out, wants to empower you for good works. Paul is going to call them to what theologians call "sanctification". That's just another way of saying the ongoing process of becoming more and more like Jesus. And the way that he lays it out is he says, I'm going to call you to work out, and to shine, and then to rejoice. Work out your salvation, shine like lights in a dark world, and rejoice, that God would call you to serve and suffer for his sake.

First of all, work out your salvation. Paul says it this way, Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to do (or to work) for his good pleasure. Family, the Christian life is not passive. I'm sure you've heard people say stuff like this, "Let go and let God." Or, you know, "God helps those who help themselves." And neither one of those things are biblically true. That's not how it works. We don't just let go. And God doesn't just let go. We work out our salvation and we work it out with him.

Now I want to be clear. We don't believe that we're saved by our good works. Paul is not calling them to a works salvation, but he is calling them to a salvation that works. A salvation that works out. And what it works out, is we work out what God works in us, and what God works through us. That's how it works. So the good news of the gospel is that God saves us. We don't save ourselves. And he doesn't just kind of save us and then let us go on our own, he continues. In fact, family, I know you've heard me teach this before, but our salvation has three tenses. We, we have been saved from the penalty of sin. We will be saved from the presence of sin. But right now we are also being saved from the power of sin, so that we can live a new life today, that we have power to live a life that resembles Jesus today.

And so Paul is talking about that present salvation right now, when he says that we are going to see God at work in us, both to will and to do according to his good pleasure. See, our salvation is ultimately God's work in us to continue transforming us into the image of Christ. And we work out that salvation through obedient service and sacrifice to others. We follow the same pattern of Jesus. The way we work out our salvation is we humble ourselves in order to become obedient. I want to say that

again. The way we work out our salvation is that we humble ourselves in order to become obedient. So Jesus said this of his own life, that he did nothing apart from the Father. He completely humbled himself to become obedient to God, the Father. And then in John 15, he tells us, Apart from me, you can do nothing.

And so what we need to acknowledge is that we've got to, first of all, humble ourselves and say, in order to do the very work that God wants us to do, we have to acknowledge we can't actually do it without God. We have to admit we've already fallen short we've sinned, we need a Savior, we need to recognize that Jesus is the only one who perfectly humbled himself and with absolutely obedient, even to the point of death for us, and that we need to be not only forgiven of our sins, but made new, given a new heart, new desires and new power. And in our humility, we say to God, I need you to keep working on me, to change my desires and to give me the power to live a new life. And then when as we do that, we'll find that God is at work in us, changing what we want and enabling us to do what we couldn't apart from him. We work out what God is working in us and working through us. That's what it looks like.

And you know, you see this in Peter. If you remember, Peter is in the boat, Jesus is on the water. He says, Jesus, if that is you tell me to come to you. So what is he doing is humbling himself being obedient to Christ and whatever he says. And Jesus says, Yes, it is. And Peter, if you remember, immediately starts to put his foot over the boat and steps out on water, and God enables Peter to do in his humility and obedience, what only Jesus could do as Peter trusted him. Now we also notice Peter eventually takes his eyes off him and he begins to sink. And that is a real picture of us working our salvation with fear and trembling. We realize we have to continue to fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author, and Perfecter of our faith, that we have to depend humbly on him to enable us to do what only he can perfectly do.

Now, the question I want to ask you, as you think about this idea of a God changing your will, your desire and giving you the ability to live a new life, where do you presently need God to do that? Where do you presently need God to will and work in you? In other words, where do you need God to give you the "want to" do what he wants? And then the ability to do what he asked.

I remember years ago when I was working on our neighbors house, some of you heard me tell the story of Nikki and the house that she lived in, that she'd been hoarding stuff for 15 years. And after she passed away her nephew, and she had

come to faith, some of you know, that story, but her nephew, wanted to live next door to us. And we let her know, let them know that the place is a mess. You're not going to want to live there. And he said, No, I want you to help me. And we can, maybe we can clean it up and transform it. So we spent probably about two or three months cleaning that place out, hauled out probably 15 to 20 thousand pounds of garbage. And I remember one night I was sitting in our front room, just exhausted. We've been working every single night for many weeks. I was so tired, Jonathan knocks on the door and he's like, Hey man, let's go do some more work at grandma's house. And I'm just like, I'm so tired. And Janie looks over at me and she gives me that, look, you know, men, you know what I'm talking about, if you're married and your wife has given you that look that look that says, You know what you're supposed to do, get off your butt and go to work.

And I knew it. And yet there was this part of it just didn't want to. And in that moment, I heard this passage going on in the back of my mind, Work out your salvation, Jeff, with fear and trembling, for it's God who's at work and you both to will and to do. And that moment, I just started to pray and say, God, you've got to give me the want to, because I don't have it. I just don't want to. And as I prayed that he changed my heart and he gave me a love for Jonathan and a love for his family. And, and that was all motivated by a love for Christ and how Jesus was willing in his most trying and painful hour to stay on the cross for me. And that motivated me. And then I remember it was literally like pushing myself out of the seat, I was so tired. And as I did, it's like, God gave me power. I mean, I felt physical strength come through my body and we worked for hours. Well, after several months of that work, Jonathan finally came to faith in Jesus as well. And I think a big part of it was he saw salvation at work. It wasn't just a message. He heard us proclaim. He watched it work in our lives.

You know, today in our present situations, I think about the riots, and I think about the protests, and I think about COVID-19, and I mean, all the things that are against us in so many ways. I just think, God, I need your help again. I need the desire to not give up. I need the ability to listen. I want to hear the heart of people. I want to know what they're going through. I want to enter in, Jesus, as you would. And I'll be honest. There's days when I just want to stay in my house. I want to just not get on another Zoom call. I want to not have to read another book. I mean, that's my honest reality, and yet the Lord says, Jeff, I'll give you the will. And I'll give you the ability to work for your brothers and sisters who desperately need you to humble yourself and love them like I do. Family, Paul says, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. That's a way of saying, be in awe of God, and his presence, and his power. And he's

in this, and he's watching that he's present. And it's not a shaming presence, it's not a guilt-bearing presence, it's a, I want to empower you presence. I want to join you in this presence.

God is saying to us he has plenty for what we need right now, so that we can join him in the work of fighting for justice, of loving our brothers and sisters who are not like us, coming alongside those who are oppressed, caring for those who are depressed and discouraged. See, family, fear and all that we have of God should lead us to the fear of the Lord, which Proverbs says is the beginning of wisdom. It says, this is the way you walk. When you start to realize who God is and what he's done and what he can do, and you are in awe that, then nothing will hold you back from doing what he calls you to do. Unfortunately, far too often, we live in much greater fear of others. We were more concerned about what people think of us or how we might fall short or fail and in doing so, we put others above Jesus.

I want to encourage you family, the last hymn we read last week is that his name is above every name. So that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow. And every tongue confess that he is Lord. He's Lord today, over what we're going through. So we work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Humbly, acknowledging our need. And then stepping out in faith and obedience, trusting God will give us the will and the power to do it. Now don't miss this, he says, work out your, that's plural, so that's communal, that's the whole church, work out your salvation. Paul wants us to remember, we're doing this together. We can't do this in isolation. In fact, you will not be able to work out your salvation if you stay alone. That's why we want you to be in DNA groups and missional communities, because you need each other and you can't even practice the commands of Jesus in isolation. You got to do them in community with one another.

And as we do, the second thing will start to happen. We will shine as bright stars who light up the world. One of the vacations, that is one of my favorites for our family is going to Lake Chelan. Haven't done a few years, but one of the things I love, absolutely just sitting out at night, it's dark. we're far enough down the lake where there's no lights, and you just see the stars come out. And there's literally millions of them. And we just sit back for hours on these chairs that lean back so we can kind of recline and just look straight at the sky, and see these bright lights shining in a dark sky. And Paul's words are imploring us to see ourselves as that. Family, you and I are the light of the world. Jesus called us to be a light in a place by how we shine for Jesus.

And Paul anticipates here that final day of Christ, when he will return and judge the world, and then he will make all things new. And that the point of this day of Christ that he wants to put in our mind, it's not just that we would live in the fear of that day, but we would live with anticipation of that day. And also pray that that day starts to sneak into today. In other words, that the future would start to bleed out in the presence, through people who are connected to Jesus, who already has the future in his hands. So the church is supposed to be like a trailer to a movie. That we would live and love in such a way that people would taste and see what it will be like one day when there will be no injustice. When there will be no division. When there will be no hatred. When justice will roll down the mountains, like mighty waters, as Martin Luther King said in quoting Amos that there will be a picture like that happening one day. But we today are the foretaste of that future.

Church, we're supposed to live like we believe that's not only going to happen, but that it can happen today on earth as it is in heaven, as Jesus taught us to pray. And so I implore you, I just encourage you and exhort you, please family, understand, we get to shine right now in this dark moment.

How? Well Paul said to the church in Philippi, Do all things. How many things? All things, without grumbling, or disputing, or quarrelling. And what he's getting at here, is he's getting at your internal motivation, and then externally, how you treat one another. James said that the tongue is so powerful, who can control it? Jesus said, it's out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks. And now here, Paul is saying, the working out of your salvation will show up in how you talk. Your speech is evidence of how you're working out your salvation in such a way that God's doing what he wants to do in and through you every day. I'm becoming more and more convinced, especially now, that one of the greatest evidence of God's salvation at work in us is the transformation of our speech. Especially in a day when we can speak in so many different forms.

And I don't know about you, but I feel like we need, God's saving grace right now to rescue our tongue, and the things that we're saying. See, Paul says grumbling has no place in the gospel. Grumbling ultimately has to do with discontentedness, which is connected to selfishness. It's considering myself more significant than others. And then when I don't get my way, I just grumble and complain. Family, we hear in a lot of different forms. As church leaders, and I think Paul, as he's writing this, he's gotten mind Moses and Aaron and the Israelites going through the desert grumbling and

complaining, and God had wanted nothing to do with that. But we hear it in the church too. And I don't say this to shame you. I just say it to, to watch yourself. Because if we think that the church and the experience we have is all about us, then we'll primarily be thinking about what I got out of it.

We'll complain that the music is too loud while another group is complaining it's too soft. Well, now you get to control it on your computer at home. But I just want you to pause and just ask yourself, Am I a grumbler? Am I a complainer? And the grumbling at work about my boss or my coworkers? Am I grumbling over the dinner table about either the meal we're eating, or the day I had. Some of us have been grumbling about our governor, trying to do his very best to deal with COVID-19.

And then more recently with the protest, and I'm not talking about the riots, or the protest, some of us, and I would say this especially those of us who are white, we've been, we've been grumbling. We've been saying how we think it should be. And I just want to pause and ask you to, to think of someone else's interest right now. Think about what they're going through. You probably have no idea. So be careful. This is not the time to give in to the way the world does things. How's your grumble meter these days? The second, how about quarrelling? Arguing? Disputing? And now there's some of you go, I kept I'm the gift to the church of the one who wants to argue and quarrel. And that's not a gift to the church. In fact, one of the requirements of an elder that they must not be quarrelsome, because they're supposed to set an example for the whole church to not be quarrelsome. How's your quarrel meter?

Now see, quarrelling has to do with the need to be right. To prove the other wrong. It doesn't slow down and consider someone else's interest or need. Let me ask, do you enjoy arguing? On Facebook on Twitter? And I want to give you an example, that I think is very appropriate to our situation. When someone posts, "Black Lives Matter" quarrelling is when you respond by saying, "all lives matter". Now don't start quarreling with me over the screen. Hold on, let me turn it around another way. Many of us who love Jesus are pro-life. And so we might post something like, you know, "Let's speak up for the unborn." And then when someone posts in return, "Well, what about everybody else?" That's also quarreling. And so you've probably been on the other end of that, for either one of those quotes that you've put out there. And neither one of them are helpful. I mean, God, doesn't say when he commands Israel, "Care for the orphan and the widow", and then you and I respond to him, "Well, what about everybody else?" And he goes, Oh, you're right, I forgot about them. No, the reason why he's saying it is not to negate, caring for everybody else.

He's just saying the orphan, the widow is being oppressed right now. They're not being cared for right now. So Israel, others are being cared for, but they aren't. So it's time to care for them. And that's, that's a heart that's committed to someone else's interest. Someone else's needs, to truly listen and not just prove yourself every time someone shares their heart. And that's just an example about what's going on right now, but pay attention to how many times you want to be right at the cost of somebody else being wrong. That's not the heart of Christ.

You see, this is all connected back to working out our salvation. Because what comes out of the mouth is really an overflow of what's going on in your heart. That's why Paul says that you may be blameless and innocent. Blameless is how people perceive you. Innocent is how God perceives you. That you may be blameless and innocent children of God, without blemish in the midst of this crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

D.W. Hanson says it this way, To be blameless, to be a blameless Christian community, means that no one can find the faults of griping and bickering in the words or tone of our conversation in the community. To be pure, innocent, Christian community means that Christians do not mix their good works with negative complaints. Their speeches like good undiluted wine. When children of God are without fault, their conversations will be, will not be marked by the blemishes of bitter criticism or angry quarrels.

It's interesting that the thing, according to Paul, that makes us stand out as bright lights in a dark world is what we do with our tongues. That is the distinguishing factor, according to Paul, that makes us look entirely different than the rest of the world. How we talk to, and how we talk about other people. Family, how are we doing with this? Now? I want to be clear, it is right, and it is godly to speak out for the oppressed. That's, that's different than speaking just for me, bitter, bitter complaints, grumbling wanting to be right and you to be wrong. That's not the same thing. That the biblical prophets are full of God, through his prophets, calling people to justice and mercy. To the workout loving kindness and grace in our relationships. And there is a very strong reason right now for us to cry out for those who've been oppressed. The cry against injustice and racism today. But how we do it is just as important as that we do it. And I want to remind you family, everyone, everyone is watching right now. They're watching everybody. We have the opportunity to be a picture of the children of God

shining like bright lights in a very dark sky. They're watching. And we don't think about ourselves in this, we think about Christ. And what they're seeing about him.

See the apostle Paul says it this way, We're 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. Don't miss that. We're holding fast to the word. The word is the gospel. The word is spoken. The word ultimately is Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. And what he wants for the Philippians' church is for them to look back with Paul and say, we didn't run in vain. We were very mindful of the watching world, not just hearing a message that we proclaim, but seeing it, by how we proclaim it, by how we treat one another, by how we love one another. See, Paul wants us to be clear. You can't faithfully hold fast to the gospel message of God's grace, mercy and kindness while you speak words that lack grace, mercy and kindness. You can't do both. You can't hold fast to the gospel when your life displays that you don't actually believe it. So he wants the message that we proclaim to be embodied by the words and the manner in which we proclaim.

So Paul wants us to be able to say, I rejoice that I got to serve and suffer for Jesus Christ. That I didn't run in vain. That I held fast to the message. And I love what he says here in verse 17, he says, Even if I'm to be poured out as a drink offering, anticipating the fact that he may lose his life as he holds fast with not just as words, but as manner of life, the gospel of Jesus Christ, he says, even if I'm poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad, and I rejoice with you all. And then he tells them to do the same. Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice in me.

That drink offering was an offering they would pour over a sacrifice. Once the main sacrifice was offering offered up, it was like a completion of the sacrifice. They'd pour out wine over it as a way to say we've finished giving all we've got for our God. In particular, we do this for Jesus. And the Philippians had already given sacrificially to support Paul's ministry, so that he could stay in prison, but also receive what he needed. And so Paul is saying, I am going to continue to give my life as that drink offering, poured out on the sacrifice of your faith so that together we can complete what Jesus started. He uses the language "poured out" because he wants them to intentionally, remember Jesus was poured as the ultimate sacrifice for you and me. And now we, as we pour our lives are bringing completion to the very work that he started, so that we would be the people of God shining as bright lights on a dark night.

Don't forget this. He poured out his life for you. He laid down his life for you. He took what you deserved, and gave you what he deserved in exchange. He was punished as a criminal so you and I could go free. He is the Son of God who is cursed, rejected, so that you and I might be loved and accepted as sons and daughters of God. And he didn't once grumble or complain. And he never tried to defend himself. In fact, he kept his mouth shut. Isaiah says, Like a sheep before sheers, he did not open his mouth. Had he opened his mouth, he could have spoke a word of condemnation over all of us. But instead he only spoke a word of forgiveness. He did that so that you and I would be free. So then instead of being guilty, we would be forgiven. Instead of being condemned, we'd be accepted. And he did it so that he can now do it in you and through you in this present moment.

So he wants the world to see you and I working out our salvation, shining like bright stars in a dark night, and rejoicing that we get to be that drink offering pouring out our lives, completing the work that Jesus has sent us to do in this world right now. Family work, shine, rejoice, work out your salvation. Shine in this darkness right now. And rejoice that you and I get to participate in the service and sufferings of Jesus Christ. Church, it's time to light up the world. Let's pray.

Father, first of all, we have to acknowledge that we've fallen short. And we in so many ways have worked out with our own strength, our own salvation. And it has led not to grace, and kindness, and mercy, it's not led to lives that are pure and blameless, but instead Lord, we have to acknowledge, we probably have been complainer's. We have been grumblers. We have probably given into argumentation and quarrelsome talk. And so first of all, forgive us, and cleanse us. And Lord would you work out in us a different way of seeing people, loving people, and speaking to, and about people. We need you, as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, we need you to be at work in us, both to will, and to do according to your good pleasure. Help us. And Lord, we want to be able to look back and say, we didn't run in vain. But we held to the gospel, and we didn't just hold to it, we proclaimed it. And we didn't just proclaim it, we let it shape how we treat people. So Jesus, would you be glorified in us, your church. And in this particular moment in history, would you enable us to shine brightly? The truth of the gospel and everything we do. We pray this in Jesus name, amen.

Family, as we respond to this message, I want to encourage you to continue to be generous. In some ways, like Paul said, be obedient like you have been, even when we can't be together. And so I want to continue to encourage you. Thank you. First of

all, want to commend you and encourage you. Church you've been so faithful in your giving and we ask that you continue to be generous in that. Second, I wanna encourage you to process through these two questions together. I'm going to give you about 10 minutes to do that. First of all, in what area of life do I need to work out my salvation? In other words, where do I need God to change my will, and to give me new ability to obey him? Where do I need to work out my salvation? Second, how does my speech need to change so that I can bring light to the world right now? So talk through those two questions. When you're ready, you can go to communion and there's a link that you can follow that will help you do that. If you don't know how to do that. And then we'll come back together after these 10 minutes and I'll lead us in a benediction

I'd love to have us all stand, like we stood when we read the word, I want you to stand to receive this blessing. May the world see the light of Christ in your lives this week, as you work out your salvation with fear and trembling, may you shine as God's who display God's loving kindness and just mercy. And may you rejoice that you get to be poured out as an offering of service and sacrifice just as Jesus Christ was for you, and do it for him. May God be with you, may he be glorified through you in these days, church, it's time to shine. I pray that you will