

A Blameless Partnership

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] In the 1980s, long before my time, there was this movie called Cocoon. Does anyone remember Cocoon? Some nods of heads.

In the film, there were these friendly aliens disguised as humans. And there were points in the film where they revealed who they were.

And they pull away this kind of human skin. And there was this blinding light inside them, sort of bursting out. In a way, that's how the Apostle Paul views Christians.

Fully human, of course. And yet, shining inside. In verse 15, he says, Children of God, without fault, in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.

I don't know what you think about that, but I think that's an incredible purpose for your life. You might feel when you look in the mirror at yourself in the morning, I'm doing pretty well for myself.

[1 : 08] You might think, I'm someone who people think well of and I'm doing quite well. Well, that's good to feel like that. But what matters much more is what God thinks of us. And here is the possibility that God can look at you and say, Compared to the rest of mankind that I made, you are like a shining star.

You might be somebody who doesn't feel like that about yourself at all. Someone who feels you've made mistakes, bad decisions that you're still living with. Perhaps that you've failed at things.

And yet God says, here in his word, You can shine like a star for me. But it takes work. And that's what we're going to look at tonight. We're in this series in Philippians.

It was a letter written by a Christian Paul, a leader to this early church. And Paul began this major section in Philippians with chapter 1, verse 27. It's like a headline.

Just have a look at that again. Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. It's literally, citizenize yourselves.

[2 : 15] Live as a citizen of heaven. The Philippians were Roman citizens. But Christians are given a new identity from Jesus Christ. Citizens of heaven.

So how do we live like that? Well, we have to change on the inside. Paul wants us to have the same attitude as Jesus Christ. And he said that in verse 5 that we looked at last week.

What was Jesus' attitude? He used everything he had to serve others and obey God. Verse 8.

Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Jesus was fully God. He laid down his life in obedience of his heavenly father, of God the Father, and in service of others for their ultimate good.

And Paul is saying that's the mindset of a citizen of heaven. So Paul's described what Jesus did, and it's epic. It shines out across human history to us today.

[3 : 21] Now he turns to us as his followers. How do we shine? Three points tonight. The first is, work out and depend on God's good pleasure. We see that in verse 12.

Just have a look with me again at verse 12. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

It's a great phrase for us, isn't it? Work out. I don't know where you work out. Kathy, my wife, and I, we've been lucky enough to go on holiday a few times at this sports complex in Lanzarote called Club La Santa.

And it's no ordinary holiday, this place. There are these non-stop activities running all day, every day. People are out on their bikes training for the Ironman on holiday.

I, in a year, one year in complete madness, I did a half marathon that started at 7.30 in the morning. It's about like half past nine.

[4 : 26] I've run 13 miles. And one of the activities you can do there is this kind of fitness, spinning body bike, fitness bike, where you go into this room and it's called cardio fit bike.

And you go into the spinning room with all the exercise bikes and they put a heart rate monitor on you and they give you a number. Now, you don't know which number is your... Nobody else knows what number you are.

Only you know your number. But on the wall are these dials and they've got like a green zone and a yellow zone and a red zone and a dial for your personal heart rate. And so you've got this instructor playing this kind of dance music and they start shouting things like, I want everybody in the red zone!

And they're like, look at the bottom and say, number 18, get in the red zone! You're not working hard enough! You know you're number 18. You're sort of pounding away at the pedals. It's completely mad. Now, some of you will think, I would never even dream of going on a holiday like that.

Others are probably thinking, I'll look that up. I don't want to be there. But that's what I think of when I think of the phrase, work out. I think of the sweat pouring off people in the gym because they're spending themselves physically.

[5 : 33] That's the picture that Paul has of the Christian life. To obey God, to keep God's commands, to say no every day to your own desires that go against God's will, to live to please God.

You give it your all. You work out at that. So I wonder, it's worth asking, isn't it, what words might you use to describe your own relationship with God?

God would expect us to use words like striving, pressing on, working out. So, are you finding the Christian life hard work?

Even exhausting? It might be that you're doing it right. And it should feel a bit like that. But if that sounds discouraging, even a bit kind of crushing, we have to remember two vital things.

What God has done for us and what God is doing in us. So first of all, what God has done for us. And we get that from the way Paul carefully used that phrase. You notice he said, work out your salvation, not work for your salvation.

[6 : 48] I don't know whether you know anyone who's applied for British citizenship or whether you've done that yourself. There's this test that sometimes they show the questions of in the paper. I don't know if you've seen that. And you have to score like more than 75% on this test about British history and geography and culture to qualify for citizenship.

But when you invite Jesus Christ into your life, there's no test like that. He just hands you a new passport. Citizen of heaven. I've earned it for you.

Have it. Be a citizen of heaven. It's a gift. And then the Bible uses this word salvation in three different ways really. In one sense, everyone who's accepted that gift from Jesus has been saved. You were saved when you put your trust in Jesus. In another sense, we will be saved when Jesus returns to bring a new world and to judge. We will be saved on that day if you're a Christian. But the Bible also uses the phrase to describe what's going on now every day in the Christian life. We're being saved as God makes us more and more the people that he made us to be.

[7 : 58] The people that we're going to be. That's what we're to work at. Work out your salvation but don't work for it. God has given you it as a gift. And as we work, you don't just remember what God has already done for you when you became a Christian.

You also remember what he's doing in you today. That's in verse 13. If you just have a look down. For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So we don't strive on our own. We work hard for God and God works in us as we do that for his good pleasure. And that's a great thing for us because God loves us.

He is good. He wants what's best for us. He is pleased when you change for him. When you become more loving more humble more other person centred in your life.

That's God's good pleasure. So he is at work inside us changing our attitude our mindset making us more like Christ. It's not let go and let God let God get on with that.

[9 : 04] No. It's work out. Strive. Give it your all. Being encouraged by the promise that God is working in you. You can depend on his strength inside you transforming you.

Attempt great things for God. Expect great things from God. So what are you striving at in your life at the moment? I think at St Silas we're a church where almost everyone is striving at something.

For most people when I say how are you they'll say I'm busy I'm flat out we're tired. Why is that? It's because we're striving aren't we? Striving to achieve with our families with our jobs with our homes our friendships perhaps in music or sport we're strivers.

where are you throwing your energy just now? And then let me ask could we be partners together in focusing our energy on living for God?

Could you make the thing you're really working at your Christian life as you depend on him? Think of the friend who moved to London same time as me to work as a lawyer like I was.

[10:19] He works long hours like everyone else who's a London lawyer but he spends his summer holidays leading on Christian youth camps he spends his evenings preparing Bible studies for his church where he leads he often carves out time for lunch or time for a coffee with a younger Christian just to meet up with them and try and encourage them in their faith he's flat out if he hadn't done those things if he didn't do those things his legal career would have risen more quickly I've no doubt about that but his ultimate focus is broader than that he does work hard at his job but he's he's working out in God's strength to live for God that's the priority are you up for that yourself?

that's our first point work out and depend on God's good pleasure but then we learn about something that can really threaten our chances of shining like stars it's our second point work out and beware of destructive grumbling you can see the problem in verse 14 verse 14 do everything without complaining or arguing and then the result if we do that verse 15 so that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine like stars in the universe I don't know what you think about that but to me grumbling complaining arguing they sound quite innocuous and yet here we see that they are utterly poisonous if you complain if you argue you won't be pure Paul is saying you won't shine like a star in the world you'll blend in to the darkness it dims the light even look at verse 16

Paul says as we shine as you hold out or hold on to the word of life in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing isn't that really interesting if the Philippian Christians complain and argue Paul's saying I labored in vain all my work in Philippi it was in vain Paul was flat out there striving to establish a church and yet if that church turn in on themselves and start complaining and arguing Paul was wasting his time so when it comes to complaining the stakes are really high why well Paul here wants us to think about Old Testament Israel Israel were being oppressed as slaves in Egypt God rescued them he sent miraculous signs and wonders and got them out of Egypt the people even walked through the Red Sea to get away and yet as soon as they got into the wilderness the desert on the way to the promised land they started grumbling they grumbled against their leaders but really when you grumble against your leader that God's put over you you're grumbling against God so Moses said to them in Exodus 17 why do you quarrel with me why do you put the

Lord your God to the test it was God they were grumbling at and yet the grumbling went on they even said to Moses several times take us back to Egypt it was much better there than out in this desert and that grumbling spirit ended up with them being judged by God they had to wait 40 years in the wilderness they were meant to be God's children and yet God found fault with them so when Moses spoke to the next generation who grew up after them in Deuteronomy 32 he said this and Paul's kind of using the same words here Deuteronomy 32 Moses said of that generation they have acted corruptly towards him to their shame they are no longer his children but a warped and crooked generation well now Paul's using similar language to these early Christians in Philippi he's saying to them if you don't grumble if you hold on to the word of life you're the real children of God standing out from a wicked crooked depraved generation so grumbling is a serious business and that's very challenging for us today because we're really good at it aren't we we're such good complainers we complain about the weather that it's too wet it's too cold it's too hot we complain about our jobs about our bosses about our families about our friends we complain about the council about the government about politicians about crime about the police about criminals and the very real danger is that we bring that kind of complaining spirit into church life

I got my hair cut this week in Anisland where I live and I went in this barber's shop and the hairdresser she said to me you're busy today as they always ask and I said well I work for a church so not really and she said no no I said I'm flat out working for a church and she said what's the church St.

[15:30] Silas I said is it Roman Catholic I said no it's not talked a bit about it why are you Roman Catholic wondering why she'd asked she said no I'm not I go to a different church anyway we got

talking this girl this woman she's Iranian she got baptised a month ago at the Tron in the city centre amazing Iranian she got baptised a month ago her husband got baptised three years ago they were separated she's come to faith and they're back together and she's being baptised it's an amazing story but now at the Tron there are a hundred Iranians going every week to the church having a service translated in Farsi it's amazing but when you speak to people at the church it's been really hard it's been really hard for them to try and welcome in a group of people who culturally are very different from them with very different demands and needs and have to adapt and adjust what they're doing and forego their own personal preferences to welcome in over a hundred people of a different culture they're growing pains but they're difficult and the danger is then people complain don't they people say it's not how I want it to be and isn't that a danger for us potentially if we've got internationals coming to

St Silas in greater numbers we long for that we long for that but to do that we have to get used to different cultures if we've got more and more children and young people coming to St Silas which we long for it's really messy and it's noisy and it's hard work because more of us have to get involved in children's work and maybe that's not the first thing we'd want to do if our evening service grows and we long for it to grow perhaps it would grow and be helpful and building people up but not be the style that we would personally have wanted well how will we react how will you react if there are things that you disagree with or people upset you I think as well there are particular challenges with having a new minister a new leader if you don't mind me saying when it's me the bible shows us very clearly when you think about Moses Moses wasn't a church minister but it was the leadership that people grumbled against and at

St Silas there were new people arriving there's a good atmosphere but the devil will hate that and wouldn't the devil love to cause us to just grumble and complain an obvious way to do that is to cause division about the leadership have us thinking I don't like the way things are going when I was interviewed for the job at St Silas several people in the interview process last summer said to me one of the things we really need is we need a strong leader who leads from the front says this is the direction we're going in now I've said that kind of thing before but what I've meant is I really want a leader who leads things in the direction I want things to go it's quite different when you have a strong leader who does something you don't want you know I loved reading this this is by a church minister in London he says one of the things he's most thankful for about his church is the lack of grumbling and he said this there are 101 things we could grumble about no human leader is ever perfect some decisions that have been taken were probably wrong other decisions that have been taken were taken in the wrong way we can all too easily rub one another up the wrong way there will be disagreements about the way things should have been done or could be done it's true isn't it it's going to be true anywhere if you ask any member of any church what are the three worst things about your minister they can reel them off straight away I know it's true because I can do the same and it's impossible for me to be everyone's cup of tea for the leadership at St

Silas to be and to top it all off I'm English so the challenge for us is can we unite can we be a church where we unite together why would we do that because the gospel is bigger than that the gospel is bigger and it matters too much so could we make St Silas a whinge free zone for the sake of the gospel and we need to help each other with that we need to be willing to be challenged and to challenge one another about that I've been challenged before when I started complaining and grumbling basically and not really thought that that's what I was doing and a friend has said is this really helpful is it should we stop talking about this and it it really annoyed me because I don't like being challenged but they were right we have to be willing to challenge each other and be challenged by one another if we've we're starting to grumble and cause division whinge free zone and as we do that more positively let's unite around God's word in verse 16 Paul talks about us holding out the word of life or holding on to the word of life probably has both in mind it's when people if people do move away from the Bible from the word of life in a sense we do have to divide there is division as we hold on to it but we have to make sure that we continue to hold it out to others it's when you stop holding out the gospel to others that we just become introspective and start navel gazing and we'll grumble hold on to the word of life and it's as we do that even when we're opposed opposed by friends for being a Christian opposed by other churches even it's when we unite around the Bible that's when we shine like stars stars are awesome aren't they they are amazing it is breathtaking I think to think that across the universe there are these balls of gas these incandescent bodies that are so big and so powerful you can see them all across the cosmos I

mean that is amazing isn't it and without them we wouldn't have any light we wouldn't have any heat we can shine like that if we unite together around the truth and make St.

Silas a whinge free zone but it's still hard work that we're talking about so what can keep us going what can energize us as we work out together for God well that's our third point work out and rejoice in the faith of others Paul's example is amazing in verse 17 he's in prison remember he doesn't know if he'll survive verse 17 but even if I'm 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 with me so Paul's using temple language here the main sacrifice on the altar at the temple was this day of atonement sacrifice in the Old Testament before Jesus came you brought an animal and offered the animal in your place for your sin the animal died in your place we don't have to do that anymore because Jesus is our once-for-all sacrifice in our place on the cross but if you were in the

[23 : 13] Old Testament and you were enjoying a living relationship with God one of the things you could do in response to God's goodness to you you could just bring a fellowship offering to God as a way of expressing your love for God and you could pour a drink offering on what you brought as an expression of your thanks that's how we as Christians today are to look at the whole of our lives we live them as a fellowship offering to God so Paul he's working out he's spending himself in God's service he's in prison for being a Christian he's close to death he describes it as like being poured out like a drink offering and alongside that drink offering for God of his life do you notice what is being what is being poured on what else is being done for God thanks to his ministry in verse 17 he says he is poured out on the sacrifice and service coming from their faith now he prayed in chapter 1 that their love for God would grow and grow and produce this fruit of righteousness kind of godly living among them now he's saying when that happens that when they live lives of love stemming from their faith in Christ Paul is overjoyed even though it's cost him everything to set them on the right track in their faith so what are you working for what are you really working out at usually that's about related to our ambition isn't it I wonder what do you want to be remembered for by other people what would you be happy for people to remember you for as an epitaph on your life maybe at the moment you might think about being remembered for being successful in your career for being clever or for being remembered for what a good friend you've been to other people or how good you were at sport something like that well Paul urges us to reconsider what we'd want to be remembered for how about being remembered by others ultimately for the way you help them to grow in their faith in Christ it makes sense doesn't it I think myself about the people who helped me come to faith in Jesus myself who answered my questions the people who modeled the Christian life so well I think about the people who since then since I became a Christian have helped me to grow in my faith who've been patient with me helping me to know God better to love him more people who've prayed for me I cannot thank them enough if any of those people were to think about me about the ways that they've transformed my life and my eternity shouldn't that make them rejoice at what they've done for me and that joy can be ours as well the joy of thinking of the people you've spent yourself loving and serving the people we've told about Christ the people we've met up with to study the

Bible together the people we've prayed for the joy of thinking of them and how they've come to faith and grown in faith offering ourselves like a drink offering but seeing the sacrifice and service coming from their faith people you've taught as children in church on weeks when you had to carve out the time to prepare and you felt too busy people you brought on Christianity explored on nights when you really just wanted to go to bed people you've met up with week after week to open the Bible with them wondering week by week is this really having any effect if you serve people like that and their trust in Christ grows and they live for him more and more you'll rejoice it will bring you joy so friends it's a dark world how do we shine like stars let's be a church that's so overwhelmed by what Jesus has done for us in dying on the cross that we work out for him we fight not to grumble and we spend ourselves in God's strength for the progress of others so that we can rejoice as they grow in their faith let's have a time of quiet and then we'll pray together why not look back over the passage or talk to God in your own heart and then

I'll lead us in a prayer your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus heavenly father we praise you once again for the Lord Jesus Christ that being in very nature God he made himself nothing that being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross we praise you for exalting him to the highest place giving him the

name that's above every name we long for the day when every tongue will confess that he is Lord and so father God we pray that you'll help us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling to obey you as he did with the attitude that he had remembering that it's you working in us that we might depend on you as we change for you help us heavenly father by your spirit not to complain not to argue but to hold on together to your word the word of life that we might shine like stars for you and father we pray that in your great kindness to us as we serve others seeking their growth in their faith we would see lives transformed good decisions made loving acts that bring us joy and we pray this in Jesus name Amen and amen yes you you you