

Work Out, Shine Out, Pour Out

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[0 : 00] So Philippians 2, starting 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.

For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.

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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks, Ali, for reading.

[1 : 13] My name is Martin Ayres. I'm the senior minister here at St. Silas. It's great to see you here. You can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you find that helpful as we look at this portion of Philippians together, continuing a series in this magnificent book.

Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. Some words from Psalm 119. Cause me to understand the way of your precepts, that I may meditate on your wonderful deeds.

My soul is weary with sorrow. Strengthen me according to your word. I run in the path of your commands. For you have broadened my understanding.

So, Heavenly Father, we recognize that this is your world, that you made it and you made us. We thank you that your word helps us make sense of your world.

So we ask, Father God, that you broaden our understanding, that we might run in the path of your commands. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

[2 : 25] So sometimes there's something new coming on the horizon and it reshapes how people live day by day. We see that in sport all the time as people have a target.

So last summer in Glasgow, we hosted the European Championships. And I don't know if you went to any of the events. It was a great festival going on in Glasgow. I went to the velodrome one day.

It was a great event, watching the cycling at the velodrome over in the East End. But the Scottish and the British cyclists didn't actually perform very well at all. A bit disappointing.

But that's partly because the competition was very good. The Germans were having a good tournament. But it's also because if you're Scottish or you're Team GB and you're a cyclist, the Olympics is the big thing that's coming.

And so the clock is just ticking for you towards Tokyo 2020. So some of Team GB's best cyclists didn't even come to Glasgow last summer because of the way that they're conditioning themselves and they want to hit form at the right time meant it wasn't the right competition for them.

[3 : 30] And there were others who perhaps entered, but they're not in the best shape yet because what they're really aiming for is Tokyo. The Olympics are the biggest prize.

Well, look, in a far greater way, God tells us in His Word that there is this radical event coming, a game-changing event. And it's so big that knowing it's coming should shape and direct our behavior today.

Paul is writing this letter to this church in Philippi that he originally pioneered. We read about it in Acts 16 as he went there. Now Paul is writing this letter from prison. He's being smashed by the Roman authorities for spreading the news about Jesus, for planting churches in these places.

And the church he planted in Philippi, we can tell from the letter, it's getting on really well. In some ways it's a model church, but actually the heat is being turned up on it by the Roman authorities.

And as that's happening, that kind of opposition from outside, cracks of division are starting to appear within the church. Now Paul doesn't know what's going to happen to him.

[4 : 37] He says that in chapter 1. He might get executed or he might be released. But he needs to prepare this church for life after Paul. What if he never sees them again?

What does the Christian life look like after your church planter, the apostle Paul, has gone? So Paul has urged them in chapter 1 verse 18, that was like a, sorry, it's not chapter 1 verse 18, it's chapter 1 verse 27.

There's like a headline over the rest of the letter, verse 27, whatever happens, as in whatever happens to him, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

And then he started to tell them what that would look like. So we heard it two weeks ago, that they would be humble, they would be like-minded. See, he says in verse 27, stand firm in the one spirit.

He talks about striving together as one for the faith of the gospel. He talks in chapter 2 verse 3 about in humility, valuing others above yourselves.

[5 : 40] So he's described this kind of behavior that would adorn the gospel and be worthy of the gospel of Christ. So that's the behavior. Why should they do that? Because verses 9 to 11 that we looked at last week, Jesus has been appointed by God the Father as Lord, Lord of all.

In verse 9, chapter 2, God has exalted him to the highest place. He's given him the name that's above every name, that is the name Lord, being in charge of everyone and everything.

And Paul tells us not just where he is now, but what the future holds. Verse 10, What he's describing there that he calls in other parts of the letter, it's the day of Christ.

The day when Christ comes in glory and we see him for who he really is. And every day, that day gets nearer. I heard a guy last week sing the four questions he asks himself every morning.

And one of them was, What kind of a day is it today? He asks himself that question every day. And every day the answer is, Today is a good day because it's a day nearer to the day of Christ.

[6 : 57] I'm nearer than I was yesterday. It's the day when we see Jesus come in glory and everyone bows their knees to him. He's like a king in exile at the moment. The reason this world is in such a mess is because the king is in exile and he's going to come any day now and it will be glorious.

Now in tonight's passage, Paul just lists three implications of that. They're overlapping. The first one is, Christ will save you, so today you should work out. Have a look with me at verse 12.

Again, as Ali read for us, 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.

In other words, if you've put your trust in Jesus Christ, if you'll do that today, if you've never done it before, then the day of Christ is a wonderful day because it's the day when he will save you.

So Paul says, knowing that you will be saved on that day, today work out your salvation. Clearly, he's talking about obeying God. He says that, as you've always obeyed in what we do, in what we don't do, in how we live, in what we love, in what we live for.

[8 : 11] And then this immediate section, these commands about valuing others above ourselves, about living selflessly, putting other people's interests before our own, being a servant, a slave of other people, enslaving ourselves to other people's needs.

Paul is not saying, work for your salvation. So important, isn't it? He's not saying, work for your salvation. He's saying, work out your salvation.

In other words, you will be saved by your faith in Jesus Christ. If that's where your faith is, if it's in him, you will be saved. You've been made right with God as a gift. But now, live it out.

Live out the implications of being a saved person day by day. And the situation they have to do that in is Paul's absence.

Verse 12, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence. So Paul's not like the classroom teacher who has everyone working and then says, I'm popping out for a bit.

[9 : 13] Just keep on working while I'm gone. I was thinking of that this week and then we had that great example of it this morning. If you're here this morning, James describing how one day in his class as a teenager, the teacher went out and him and his mate Ox, was it Ox, James?

Were hanging a guy out the window when the teacher came back in. Disaster. Pandemonium. Well, the backdrop of this letter includes that Paul might never come back to this church.

He's not going to be around forever. The church might never see him again. But he doesn't want them to be godly because of what he would think, as though he can come and inspect them.

No, rather, because Jesus is the exalted king and when he returns, we'll see just how interested he is in how we've lived in his physical absence day by day.

What have we done with the time that he's given us before he comes in glory? It's challenging, isn't it? Because we could ask, could it sometimes be fairly said of us that our Christian behavior is based on what other people will see of us?

[10 : 20] So that what we have to do for sure, we do, but there are other times when we do what we can get away with because we're not accountable. In fact, if you think, what sins are you battling with at the moment as a Christian?

Often our besetting sins, the ones where we find we're still struggling on, are ones that we know we can get away with. Ones that perhaps we've not brought into the light of accountability with friends or simply a greater awareness of God's concern for our behavior in a particular area of our lives.

Well, could we be motivated by this reality as Paul describes it that Jesus has been given the name above every name and he sees us all the time? He knows what's going on in our hearts.

And Paul talks, therefore, about fear and trembling. Do you see that at the end of verse 12? Fear and trembling. Not that we're terrified that God might condemn us. That's so critical that we hold this together with truths like Romans 8.1 from Paul.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. So if you trust Christ, there's no condemnation. We don't fear condemnation from God. But this fear and trembling is that we live with trembling gratitude in our lives.

[11 : 45] We're amazed that God would be gracious to us to call us to call us his children. And we're trembling at his holiness and his authority while knowing that he loves us and we stand in his grace.

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. And just in case we're then thinking that it's all up to us, he adds verse 13, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

So we can only be saved by God's grace but also we can only live for God by his grace as well. So living the Christian life might feel like hard work and at times it is hard work but the strength to do it comes from God working in us, reshaping our desires, motivating us, helping us to love the things that he loves and turn away from the things that he hates.

So God is at work in us and that doesn't mean that it's let go and let God or I don't need to do anything. Rather it's that one of the ways God works in us is by commanding us work out your salvation and then by his spirit graciously enabling us to do that.

The language workout, I don't know what you think of when you think of a workout. Most of us would think of the gym, wouldn't we? A spinning class or doing some weights. And it takes discipline, doesn't it?

[13 : 11] To go to the gym regularly to work out. That's why lots of us don't bother. Or you sign up to this kind of expensive monthly fee so that you think, oh I've got to go because I've paid now.

But you know, it's this picture of action, of strenuous activity. For the Apostle Paul, that's the language that he uses of the Christian life once we know that we're saved.

And it's quite a challenge, isn't it, to lots of our church culture, evangelical church culture. We are a feelings-based culture. We're an experience-based culture.

And there are times, there are certainly times, when God deeply blesses us with feelings of real joy in knowing him, real comfort in trusting his promises, in knowing that he's for us, feelings of peace, feelings of having found home with God, special times of worship in song, closeness to God in prayer.

These are blessings from God to enjoy. But the danger is that we take those and then we make the Christian life all about how we feel, all about me, all about how I'm feeling.

[14 : 29] Instead, Philippians uses all this hugely active language to describe the Christian life. He spoke in verse 6 of chapter 1 about, sorry, in verse 5 of chapter 1 about partnership in the gospel.

He's talked about, in chapter 1, verse 27, standing firm, striving together. Now he speaks about working out. We're engaged together in this tremendous mission, a struggle to advance the gospel in our world.

And we've got a struggle against the desires in our own souls not to live for God. A struggle against spiritual enemies that might manifest themselves in persecution. But all the while, God is at work in us, enabling us.

But working out, living like that, is going to look weird. So that's our second point. This generation rejects God, so today you should shine out. Paul here, he picks up the language that was used by Moses about faithless Israel in Deuteronomy.

He said they were a warped and crooked generation. And Paul uses that, he quotes that. Do you see that in verse 14? But he's not talking about the church there, he's talking about the world, the Roman Empire, the pagan culture around them.

[15 : 48] It's a description, really, of every culture that has rejected Jesus as Lord. We could say the same for our own city today, for a Western culture that we live in, a warped and crooked generation from God's perspective.

And Paul, therefore, is urging the church, stand out from the crowd. If you see the culture drifting, hold firmly to the word. Have a look with me at verse 14.

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God, without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky, as you hold firmly to the word of life.

The particular example Paul gives us there is of grumbling. It was grumbling that had been the big problem for Old Testament Israel that Moses was speaking to. That first generation of God's people, it's extraordinary when you read about it.

They were rescued by God from slavery in Egypt, brought in the wilderness on the way to the promised land, and yet they grumbled. They grumbled about the food, they grumbled there wasn't enough water, they grumbled, God will never get us into the promised land, and the grumbling was so toxic, in the end, they stopped trusting God, and they didn't make it into the promised land.

[17 : 08] Paul mentions here grumbling and arguing, and our culture around us is just full of grumbling, isn't it? The comments in our papers, when you think about it, the comments section of the newspapers is basically just professional grumbling, isn't it, about how things should be.

We grumble about Brexit, we grumble about the national football team, the national rugby team, we grumble about the weather, we grumble about there being nothing good on TV for all the channels, we grumble about being too busy, or we grumble that we're bored because we've got nothing to do, and so we get infected by that, and I was challenged this week thinking about how often when I'm under pressure, and the Philippians were under pressure, how often I grumble.

It's my pressure release valve to let everyone know that maybe I grumble about what's going on at home, or what's going on at work, about some criticism I've had, or someone hasn't done something in the way I asked them to do it, some hardship or other, grumbling about it, but because God is a sovereign God, because He is in charge of everything, our circumstances are ordained by Him, and so the danger is that grumbling is actually grumbling about Him.

It's undermining His generosity. It's making out that He's not really good. He's not really a generous Father, and running like a thread right through this letter, Philippians, is Paul's antidote to grumbling.

It's rejoicing. Paul is in terrible circumstances, but he's rejoicing in the Lord and in the advance of the Gospel that more people are coming to know the Lord. He's thankful, and he's saying to the Philippians, if you do that, if you stop grumbling and arguing, you'll shine.

[18 : 54] You'll shine like stars. He's taking a picture from the Old Testament prophet Daniel, chapter 12. God, again, the prophet Daniel was bringing a message about the last day, which we now know is called the day of Christ, and he says this, Daniel 12, verse 3, those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.

So Paul takes that picture about the future for God's people, that we'll shine like stars, and he brings it forward into the present to say, if you live distinctively now, you'll shine like stars in the present darkness of our world.

You'll be blameless and pure when people around us have rejected God and his ways, and you'll shine out. It is a brilliant thing, isn't it, when you see a good night sky?

I don't know whether you can think of an example of when you've really seen the stars. I remember going to Africa like nearly 20 years ago now, but camping in kind of rural East Africa and looking up at the sky and without any sort of light on the ground to drown it out, it looked as though the stars had suddenly become much closer.

They kind of closed in on us, and maybe you can think of a time you've been in the Highlands or in Galloway Forest Park or somewhere and seen that kind of brilliance of the stars.

[20 : 13] That's the picture of us as Christians living godly lives in amongst the people around us. It's a real encouragement, isn't it, because I think that the more that you, there can be a tendency as you grow as a Christian to feel, you know, I've just got less and less in common now with my non-Christian friends, and I just find it hard to be with them, and so we start retreating from non-Christian friendships and more and more into a Christian bubble because we feel we've just got increasingly more in common with them, whereas the challenge here in Philippians 2 is not to pull out from the world, but rather to recognize the non-Christians around us, they're living far from God, they're living in darkness, and it is a great thing if we can be around them, even if we feel very different to them, because that's us shining among them, and it's challenging, isn't it, because we don't really like being different, do we?

We don't like the idea of being looked at as really peculiarly different from people around us, but Philippians 2 calls us to see that as a privilege, actually it's a great privilege that we be shining like a star, stars don't envy the darkness, it's a great thing to be the one shining, so these are two ways the coming day of Christ shapes our living today, that we work out and we shine out, Christ will save you, so you work out, this generation's rejecting God, so shine out, and finally Paul starts talking about his own example in prisons, that's our third point, his word will give life, so today you can be poured out, Paul is under lock and key, and I guess if we were Paul, we might be feeling regret, was it really worth it?

But Paul says to them, all this suffering of mine will have been worth it if you can hold firmly on to the word, if you look with me at verse 16, halfway through, and then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.

And then he uses another illustration, this time from the temple, 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 me.

So he brings our eyes into the temple, picture the temple, under the old covenant, you brought in your offering, it was a lamb or a goat, and you brought it to the priest and it was offered on the altar.

[23 : 10] And there were drink offerings as well, red wine poured on the meat, all offered up. Now, we as God's people offer ourselves to God as a response, thankfully, to what he has done for us.

Paul is saying, if you're serving of God's church in Philippi, and you're suffering for him, if that's like the sacrificial lamb, then my suffering to establish you as believers is like, it's as though I'm the drink offering being poured out.

I'm being poured away here in prison for mission, but as long as I can look at you guys continuing in the faith, then on the day of Christ, verse 17, everyone will see and I will see that I didn't labor in vain.

Folks, let's evaluate our work in this life, mindful of what it's going to look like on the day of Christ. That's when we'll see what just passes away and what was of eternal value.

I remember chatting to a friend after summer camp and that we were just comparing notes after having been on a summer camp. I was still working as a lawyer and I remember him saying, it's knacker, isn't it?

[24 : 26] Coming back to work after a summer camp, a teenage Christian holiday. It's knacker. But in eternity, maybe there'll be this kind of graph that time goes along here and effectiveness for the Lord goes up here and it's going along each year, day by day, and then every year in our lives, there'll just be this massive explosion for one week and then it'll go back down.

Because he meant, you know, it's just so useful, isn't it? It's so valuable. And so it's worth feeling like you're underwater the next week at work and everyone else is talking about Lanzarote and you've sort of got bags under your eyes thinking, why did I share a dorm with those teenagers?

But judge the work on the day of Christ. That's when effectiveness will be revealed. If people that we've looked to encourage hold firmly to the word and they stream into the new creation.

That's how Paul views it. That's why he calls it the word of life, isn't it? His life's being poured away but others will have life on the day of Christ if they hold firmly to the word.

So what does that look like for us tonight? Maybe you're a visitor, you're looking into the claims of Jesus Christ. I guess if that's you, a lot of this is going to sound quite strange, isn't it? But could I encourage you to look at Jesus and the claim that he rose from the dead?

[25 : 51] For if he didn't, then clearly these commands are madness. But actually, if Jesus really did rise from the dead and ascend to heaven, then he is coming in glory.

That's the game-changing event that means that it is worth valuing others above yourself, living in purity, striving to serve other people. Jesus rose and the day of Christ will come.

And he did rise. And if you're not sure about that, come on the life course. We'll look at that. Together, he did rise. He is alive. Maybe you're someone who is a new Christian and you look at this stuff and you think, this sounds a bit like hard work.

You know, I got forgiven but I didn't realize I'd have to do all this. Or maybe you are someone who's flat out. You're serving other people. You're feeling weary. You're wondering how you ended up volunteering for so much on Sundays and midweek and in youth or kids.

How do we take on board the challenges of these verses? Well, we need to set them against the spiritual brain surgery that we had from Paul last week. Just before he talked about Christ's exaltation, he described his coming down from heaven to earth.

[27 : 06] If you just look with me again at verse 5, he talked about having the same mindset as Christ Jesus and so he gets out the surgical sore to get into our schools and shift our brains.

How does he do it? He says, look at Christ and his mindset. Verse 6, being in very nature God, he did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant. Being made in human likeness, he was found in appearance as a man. Then he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Why did he do it? Well, it's because he valued our interests above his own. I'm sure Jesus was hugely comfortable in heaven, been there for all eternity with angels serving him and he could have stayed there forever, very comfortable.

But moved by love for us, he became God incarnate, stepping into our world to serve and then the humiliation of a brutal death on the cross.

[28 : 13] I was just on, I was walking yesterday in a park and there was a park bench and, you know, park bench is often left as a tribute to somebody and the person it was left to, it said underneath, what did you want for your life?

Was it only to be beloved while you walked on this earth and to feel beloved? And I read it and thought, I wonder why that was written.

It might have been written in that person's case by the family or friends that left the park bench to say we loved you and you knew that we loved you. But for every Christian, we would know that's true of us every day, that we go through life knowing we're loved and feeling loved because Jesus came into our world and made himself nothing only because our interests mattered to him more than his.

so we work out and we live out and we shine out and we can pour ourselves out because we meditate on the way that he valued us above himself.

All this he did for us, what now will we do for him? Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for this extraordinary work that you've given us, this great renewed purpose for our whole lives.

[29 : 41] May our grasp of all that the Lord Jesus did, his mindset, deepen that we would gladly lay down our lives for others, valuing them above ourselves and striving together as one to get the gospel news out.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.