

"Pressing on with the Mission" Personal Obedience and the Mission Philippians 2:12-18

Introduction

- [Slide #1] For those of you who are serious, diehard New Years resolution makers here are a few that you will absolutely be able to keep. These are supposed to be funny; don't take me seriously. Write 'em down. The top ten New Years resolutions you can keep this year.
 1. Stop exercising.
 2. Watch more TV.
 3. Procrastinate more.
 4. Read less.
 5. Eat more.
 6. Eat out more.
 7. Start being superstitious.
 8. Spend less time working.
 9. Be more cynical.
 10. Take up a new habit.
- All joking aside. You know what? I really do have a resolution for you that you can keep. Paul says in **Philippians 2:12** *continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling*. Of all the News Years resolutions you could or should make to start the New Year this one should be at the top of your list. This is one resolution that you can absolutely, guaranteed, without a doubt you can keep. And here's why.
- Look at **verse 13**. *For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose*. The reason why you can keep the resolution to *work out your salvation* is because God is already at work within the Christian believer giving them the will and the ability to act. *Work out your salvation...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose*.
- That this is an important resolution for you and me to make is seen by the implications of not working out our salvation. The overall mission of the church suffers. This resolution is mission critical.

Transition

Paul says it to the Philippian church like this, that...[Slide #2]

Big Idea

- **Pressing on with the mission requires everyone who cares about the mission to work out their salvation**
- Remember, Paul's train of thought as he writes to this church goes something like this. For a church, the mission is everything. A church without a mission isn't a church—it's something else. The church exists for the sake of the mission. Paul is writing so that this partnership he

has with the Philippian church continues. *I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now*, **Philippians 1:5**.

- If the circumstances in the Philippian church call for pressing on with the mission—seeing this partnership continue—and if pressing on with the mission is impossible without unity, **2:1-4**, and if unity is impossible without humility then what does humility look like? It looks like what **2:5-11** describes, it looks like Jesus who gave up the privileges he had as one equal with God to humbly take on flesh and obediently die a sacrificial death on the cross. That kind of humility creates an atmosphere of unity within a church which in turn helps the church stay on the mission of taking the good news of Christ crucified to more and more people.
- The overall mission of the church is dependent upon the individual constituents within that church working out their salvation.

Transition

Before we look at...

Organizational Sentence

- **The three mission critical aspects of what it means to work out our salvation...**
- Let me just say a few words about the phrase *work out your salvation* and try to explain what Paul means by that phrase. What it doesn't mean is work toward our salvation. Absolutely no. That's not what Paul has in mind. **2 Corinthians 5:21** says *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*. Whatever needed to be done for salvation, whatever righteousness God requires of us for salvation has already been earned for us by Christ. Christ's words on the cross, *it is finished* means there's nothing left to be done. Christ has done it all. What needed to be earned has been earned. Therefore, *work out your salvation* doesn't mean earn your salvation. It means work on applying, living out, fleshing out the salvation that's already been earned for you. Or as **Ralph Martin** put it, "We are to work out what God in his grace has worked in."¹ Work out your salvation has to do with obedience, right? Look 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*.
- Now the reason we are to *work out our salvation* is, as I said earlier, because God is at work in us. *For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose*. God works in us and through us precisely because it pleases him to do so."² I prefer the ESV's translation of **verse 13**. *For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*. The motivation for us working out our salvation is precisely because God is already at work. It's the reason you can keep this New Year's resolution.
- This promise, this hope of God at work in us is as **Don Carson** writes, more than just strengthening us for obedience. "God himself is working in us both to will and to act: he works in us at the level of our wills and at the level of our doing... Assured as we are that

¹ Martin, p. 115.

² Fee, p. 239.

God works in this way in his people, we should be all the more strongly resolved to will and to act in ways that please our master.”³

- Think about where you are at in your spiritual journey right now. At the start of the New Year what could be more encouraging than this? “You may approach this awesome task with confidence because God himself is the one who makes it possible by producing in your lives both the will to work and the working itself, and all for the sake of his gracious will.”⁴ So we resolve, New Years resolution #1, we resolve to work out our salvation. **Pressing on with the mission requires everyone who cares about the mission to work out their salvation.**
- So what of this tension between what we do and what God does in this working out process? Working out your salvation is not a passive process—as if God does it all—let go and let God. How do those two things, what we do and what God does, how do those two play together? What is your responsibility and what’s God’s responsibility? Listen to how **John Murray** summarizes the coordination of our work and God’s in the working out, the sanctification process.
- Murray says, “God’s working in us is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of cooperation as if God did his part and we did ours so that the conjunction or coordination of both produced the required result. God works and we also work. But the relation is that because God works we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God’s working in us... We have here not only the explanation of all acceptable activity on our part but we also have the incentive to our willing and working... The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God.”⁵

Transition

Remember, **three mission critical aspects** of what it means to work out our salvation. The **first** comes in **verses 14 and 15**. [Slide #3] Part of what it means for you to work out your salvation means to **live contentedly**.

Main Points

- **Verses 14-15**. Listen. *Do everything without complaining or arguing, 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.*
- Does it surprise you in any way that of all the things Paul could list here as mission critical, work-out-your-salvation-kind-of-things, the things he lists first are *complaining* and *arguing*? What in the world is so serious about complaining and arguing or questioning?
- The image behind these verses is the grumbling and arguing of Israel when God led them out of Egypt and into the wilderness. Out there on their own it was just them and God. He had to provide. He had to lead. They had to trust. And they didn’t. They complained. No food. No meat. No water. **Exodus 15:24**, *So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What*

³ Carson, p. 62.

⁴ Silva, p. 117.

⁵ Silva, p. 123 quoting John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*. London: Banner of Truth, 1961, p. 148-49.

are we to drink?" **Exodus 16:2**, *In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.*

- In fact, their complaining became so bad they turned away from God and his appointed leaders Moses and Aaron and toward other so-called gods so that in the book of Deuteronomy Moses before he dies says of the nation of Israel, *They have acted corruptly toward [God]; to their shame they are no longer his children, but a warped and crooked generation.*⁶
- Learn from Israel's example in the wilderness. Paul says of us *do everything without complaining or arguing, 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.*
- Do you want to be a superstar for God and shine brightly for him? Then learn contentment in everything. **1 Timothy 6:8** says *but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.* Later on in this letter Paul says of himself in **Philippians 4:12-13** *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*
- Can you say that about yourself or do you grumble and complain and question God about his lack of provision in your life? In contrast to everyone else around us Christian believers are supposed to be content. We're supposed to be lights. Lights are meant to be looked at. When in darkness you stare at lights. Christian contentment stands out; it's supposed to shine out in a selfish, whining, self-pitying, grumbling, complaining world.⁷
- At its core, failure to be content, grumbling, complaining, is a sign of unbelief; a failure to trust God's provision, God's timing. It's idolatry. It's saying to God, I think there is someone else, something else that can take care of me better than you can. Back in Deuteronomy it says of Israel, **Deuteronomy 32:15** *[Israel] abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior.*
- If God is at work in you, like it says in **verse 13**, working in and through every circumstance, the riches, the poverty, the sickness, the health, the stormy weather, the clear skies, if he's working in you according to his good pleasure, all because it pleases him, then who are you to complain and grumble against him? He knows what he's doing.
- Why does Paul single out this issue of contentment as the first aspect of working out one's salvation? Because it gets right at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian believer—a follower of Christ. Ultimately, where does your contentment in this life come from? And is he, meaning God, is he alone, by himself, without anything else, is he enough? To quote **John Piper**, "God is most satisfied with us when we are most satisfied with him." Are you satisfied with him?
- I'm not sure we can see this flaw in ourselves on our own. I think we need outside help on this one. May I suggest to you that after the service today you ask your spouse, do I argue

⁶ Deuteronomy 32:5

⁷ Carson, p. 63.

and quarrel and question God? Ask your kids, do I complain? We won't go anywhere as a church, if individually we can't get a handle on this one. **Live contentedly.**

Transition

Paul singles out a **second aspect** of working out one's salvation in **verse 16**. [Slide #4] Hold out the word of life. **Faithfully proclaim the word of life.**

- Listen again starting in **verse 14**. *Do everything without complaining or arguing, 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 16 as you hold out the word of life--in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.*
- There's really no two ways about it. If you are working out what God, by his grace, has worked in then people are going to notice. You are the light of Christ. Remember Jesus' words? *You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*⁸
- And if by your life you are shining the light of Christ, people will notice and be drawn to the light. Should we be surprised when they're drawn? When they are drawn do we shoo them away? No. And we're not to be big bug zappers that shock people as they are drawn to us. We are to gently, lovingly, carefully, graciously, compassionately, tenderly hold out to people the *word of life*, the word which is life to people's souls, the good news, the gospel of Christ crucified for sins.
- The image of Christian believers holding out the word of life suggests that we all, every one of us, are to do the work of an evangelist. It's simply not appropriate to say, "but I didn't ask to be a light" or to leave that shining business to other, "more qualified" believers. No excuses. We are lights. Paul seems to say at the end of **verse 16** that the mission, this ongoing partnership between himself and the Philippian church for the sake of the gospel, is dependent upon each individual believer holding out the word of life. Otherwise, he says, his race has been run in vain. Effort and energy and time have been wasted. Paul says hold out the word of life to people so *that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.*
- Here's the deal. Only as we firmly hold fast to the word of life can we effectively hold it out to people.⁹ What are you holding fast to at the start of this New Year? You will hold out to people the thing or things that you are holding dear. What are you holding out? Is it the *word of life* or is it something else? Only as you firmly hold fast to God's word can you effectively hold it out as life to others. What are you holding to?
- What would need to change in order for you to answer "I'm holding fast to God's word"? May I suggest to you the goal of reading the bible every day? Beyond reading it. Live in it. Saturate yourself with it so that when people are drawn to you, you have something of worth, of value to given them in return.

⁸ Matthew 5:15-16

⁹ Martin, p. 122.

Transition

Look at [verses 17-18](#); the [third](#) and final aspect of working out your salvation. [[Slide #5](#)]

Joyfully pour out your life for others.

- *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. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.*
- Paul acknowledges that the race he runs, the Christian life, is a life of service and sacrifice for others. The image that captures what Paul's life is like is an image from the Old Testament; the image of a *drink offering*. In the Old Testament the priests, called Levites, would serve God in the temple by doing what [Exodus 29:38-41](#) and [Numbers 28:7](#) describe.
- *"This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day: two lambs a year old. 39 Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight. 40 With the first lamb offer a tenth of an ephah (about 2 quarts) of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin (about 1 quart) of oil from pressed olives, and a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering. 41 Sacrifice the other lamb at twilight with the same grain offering and its drink offering as in the morning--a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire...The accompanying drink offering is to be a quarter of a hin of fermented drink with each lamb.*
- Paul speaks of his life in terms of this *drink offering*—being poured out for others. Remember, he's in prison as he writes these words.
- But his sacrifice, as an apostle, for the sake of the Philippian church is just part of it. The Philippians play a part too. Paul says he's the drink offering, they are the sacrifice. *But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith.*
- What Paul seems to be saying is that in either case, whether as an apostle or as individuals who comprise a church, the Christian life is a life of sacrifice. One's a drink offering the other is the sacrifice itself. In either case—both give up their lives for others so that God is pleased. What Paul seems to be suggesting is that “his imprisonment, besides being a drink offering to the Lord, is to be understood as his part of their common suffering, the drink offering poured out in conjunction with their sacrifice.”¹⁰ Do you see what he's saying?
- A couple of points of application. This, right here, is what it means to worship. In the New Testament our spiritual act of worship is service and sacrifice for others. [Romans 12:1-2](#), right? *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.* It is ludicrous to think of worship in terms of singing only—if your idea of worship is neutered from the notion of sacrifice and service then you haven't really worshiped. To worship is to serve.
- Second, all this sacrifice and serving must spring from faith. Paul says he is *poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from [the Philippians] faith.* The implication is that there is a sacrifice and service out of duty, out of obligation, out of guilt. And all those are to be rejected. We are to serve and to give and to sacrifice for others in a way that springs from faith otherwise our sacrifice is unacceptable to God. [Romans 14:23](#)

¹⁰ Fee, p. 254.

says that *everything that does not come from faith is sin*. Whether your act of worship is serving children or the homeless or preaching or hospitality or giving or leading in song or being hospitable or serving on the mission field, if that act of service doesn't spring from faith then it is offered up in vain—it is unacceptable to God.

- And so Paul reminds the Philippians, he reminds us, the Christian life is a life of service, of sacrifice, by faith, for others. And Paul invites the Philippians, he invites us to respond to this life of sacrifice in the same way that he has responded—with joy. We are to offer up our lives with joy. *I am glad and rejoice with all of you* he says. Then [verse 18](#). *So you too should be glad and rejoice with me*. [Verse 18](#) is an invitation for all believers everywhere to reciprocate with the same attitude.¹¹ The Philippians themselves, by faith are to sacrificially offer up their lives to God through the act of serving others. And they are to do that joyfully, gladly—without reservation—like Paul.
- Author [Annie Dillard](#) once said, “A life without sacrifices is abomination.”¹² I think she would receive a hearty amen from Paul.
- This is part of what it means to work out your salvation—joyfully giving of your life for others. Collectively, this is what keeps a church on the mission.

Conclusion

- Are you ready for the New Year? This is a great New Year's passage isn't it? *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, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose*. That fear and trembling part? That's Paul's way of saying this is serious, important stuff. You couldn't hand-pick three, more important resolutions to stare the New Year. **Live contentedly. Hold fast and hold out the word of life faithfully. Sacrifice and serve joyfully.** Happy New Year.

¹¹ Fee, p. 256.

¹² Annie Dillard, *Leadership*, Vol. 10, no. 1.