

Phillipians 2:12-18

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[0 : 0 0] Well, thank you to the band for leading us this far, and a very warm welcome from me. My name is Graeme. I work here at the church, and I just want to echo what Paul has said, quite literally echo what Paul has said, by welcoming you here this morning.

Especially if this is your first time, I've spoken to a lot of new people this morning. You're so welcome with us, and I just hope that you enjoy your time with us. Can I invite you now just to open your Bibles to Philipians 2, verses 12 to 18.

That's where we're going to be this morning. So vital that we have God's Word open in front of us as we come to hear from Him. So let's have our Bibles open, and let's be ready to hear and to receive what He has to say to us by His Spirit this morning.

So shall we pray, and then we can get into this passage together. Let's pray. Dear Father, we ask you now, as we come to your living Word, we ask that by your Spirit that you would be our teacher and our guide.

And would He stir in us a passion for your name, a love for your Son, and a desire to see His name lifted high, both in our church and in our city here, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[1 : 1 5] Well, we are now halfway through our little summer series in Paul's letter to the Philipians. And I don't know if you noticed it, maybe you were here last week, but as of last week, we've entered a new section of this letter.

So if you remember quite a few weeks ago, Paul began this letter by talking about what God had been doing in his life. That he may be in jail in Rome, but despite his change, the gospel of Jesus Christ was continuing to go forth and transform lives.

Because so in control is God that he is using even the most desperate and frustrating looking of circumstances to accomplish his purposes in the world.

That was the first part of the letter. Paul was talking about himself. Well, if you look at verse 27 of chapter 1, you'll see that Paul turns from talking about him to talking about them.

So now he's addressing these Christians in Philippi, these Christians who are living out, striving to share the good news of Jesus Christ in their city.

[2 : 3 3] Now, what does Paul want for them? We picture them. What does Paul want for them as a church? Well, you see it in that first verse of that second section of the letter. Paul's headline appeal, verse 27 of chapter 1.

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. That's the headline of the second part of the letter as he turns to think about these Christians.

Now, I watched a fascinating documentary recently about the New Zealand All Blacks, the rugby team. Now, I know there's some Kiwi links in the congregation this morning, so we'll let them have their moment.

In the Northern Hemisphere, we look on and we think, how on earth does a little nation like that go to dominate a sport, a worldwide sport like rugby? So this documentary was trying to get to the bottom of why New Zealand are so good at rugby.

Well, the documentary goes on and you see the presenter, he goes around New Zealand, he interviews different people, and they get to the bottom of it, they think. Because in New Zealand, they have this saying, and maybe somebody will know, heard of this, that in New Zealand, great people make great All Blacks.

[3 : 45] This is what they say, that to wear that black jersey is to do something more than just to play sport. That it's an honour, and it's a privilege.

And if you're going to pull on that black jersey, then your performance off the field is going to be just as good, if not better, than your performance on the field. In fact, so convinced are they of this, that former All Blacks, instead of hitting the beach and retiring, they hit the schools and they hit the rugby clubs, and they give themselves to telling the next generation and making sure that they know what it truly means to pull on this All Black shirt.

It's incredible. Absolutely incredible. So I'm watching this documentary and thinking, that's kind of what Paul's saying to the Philippines here, is it not? Get that sense of it, that Paul is urging these Christians here.

What's he saying? Because God has saved you. Because you are, as Paul mentioned last week, because your identity is in Christ. That you have the privilege of being part of his people.

Then you need to live a life worthy, not just of that jersey, but of that calling. And as you wear that jersey, as you live a life worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ, you are to shine brightly in the world around you.

[5 : 04] That's what he wants for this church. Here's the danger, though, that he's aware of. We look at verse 12 of chapter 2. These Christians were going so well when he was with them.

They were going so well. And Paul remembers it. And as he remembers it, he loves it. And as he loves it, it causes him so much rejoicing as he thinks about these Christians. But just think back to when you were at school and you were working hard in the classroom and your teacher said to you, listen, class, I'm just going to nip out for a moment.

Now you've got work to do. You know what to do. It's all on the blackboard. So I want you to get on with it. And I'm going to come back. And I want to see that you're working just as hard when I'm out of the room as when I'm in the room. What is the temptation for the class?

Lose focus. So Paul is thinking about, as he thinks about this church, the fact that he's not with them. So the question is, how is Paul going to motivate these Christians in his absence, not just to not take their foot off the gas, but how is he going to motivate them to put their foot even more on the gas as they strive to live for Jesus Christ in their city?

To keep going, to keep growing, and to strive all the more to live a life worthy of their Savior. How are they going to do it? Well, in these verses, Paul presents them with a game plan for Christian growth.

[6 : 33] Here is how they're going to live lives worthy of that Jersey and calling. And I think as we look at these verses together this morning, there are some wonderful lessons as we think about our own Christian lives individually and corporately.

It's a game plan. It's got three steps to it, if you want to follow along. Step one, verses one to 11 of chapter two, Paul points to a person. This is what he does.

He points to a person. How does he begin it in verse 12 of chapter two? Therefore. Now, I was always taught that when I see a therefore, I need to pause and I need to ask myself, what is the therefore there for?

Because a therefore, what does it do? Whenever you see it, it pushes us back the way to consider what has just preceded it. And what has just preceded this therefore at chapter 12 is that Paul has given the most beautiful portrait of their Savior, Jesus Christ.

Now, I don't want to spend too long in these verses because we looked at them last week, but it's important that we try and see Paul's logic in this letter. What does Paul say about Christ? Look at it there.

[7 : 50] He humbled himself. And how did he humble himself? Well, he took on flesh. Now, that God would take our form would have been humbling enough.

But Jesus' humbling himself continued. Do you see it there? That he would allow himself to die. And his humbling self went to the greatest possible depth that Jesus would allow himself to die via insult and ridicule on a cross.

See what Paul is saying? Philippians, do you understand your Savior? Do you understand that he could not have gone any lower? And do you see, do you understand that he could not have gone any lower?

And why did he do it? He did it for you. And because he went low, because he humbled himself, what did God do? Well, God exalted him. And gave him the name that is above every name.

The name that one day every knee will bow before. What does Paul say? That mind of Christ. That is to be your mind. That's how you're to think.

[9 : 02] And we've noticed it, haven't we, as we've journeyed through this letter, how often Paul talks about mind. How these Christians are to think. And how are they to think? Well, they've to model their thinking on their Savior, Jesus Christ.

We've seen it, if you want to just really quickly look at it. Verse 2 of chapter 2, what does he say? Be of one mind. Verse 3 of chapter 2 talks about being of one mind.

Verse 5, have this mind. In other words, as you look at Jesus, as you contemplate your Savior, this is how you're to think. But not just how you're to think.

This is how you're to live. It's almost as if he takes them by the ear. And he drags them to the foot of the cross.

And he says, as you stand here, how does your pride look? As you contemplate your Savior, how do your out-of-place attitudes compare to him?

[10 : 00] How foolish do your squabbles look? John Stott, the late John Stott, used to say, every time I look at the cross, it shrinks me down to my true size.

And I think that takes us here to the bridging word between this section and our verses this morning. What was the life of Jesus Christ marked by verse 8 of chapter 2?

Obedience. Jesus, obedient to the will of his Father in heaven. And because Jesus obeyed, Paul says, looking at the Philippians, if your Savior obeyed, if your King obeyed, if the one you're trying to seek after and follow and live for obeyed, then you need to obey too.

Because I may be out of the room, so to speak, but remember, get your heads around the fact that it's not me that you're serving. It's not me that you're looking to follow after. It's Christ. So live in a manner worthy of the gospel and do so by living in constant contemplation of and constant communion with the Christ that you seek to follow after.

So step one for this church to grow, to fix their minds on Jesus Christ. Paul points to a person. Step two, verses 12 to 13, he presents a plan.

[11 : 20] And maybe this is where it gets a bit more practical for us this morning. What does Paul want them to do? Look at it there, verse 12, to work out their salvation. Now notice the words that he uses really carefully there.

What does he write? What does he not write? He does not say, work for your salvation. Being a Christian is not like Britain's Got Talent, as if we perform for God and God is somehow happy and chooses to save us.

The salvation that Jesus Christ has won for them is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And that salvation, Paul says, take it, cherish it, love it, run in it, and work it out.

Live out your salvation. Outwork your salvation. We were at a wedding the other day. My cousin got married in Glasgow. And the minister said, you need to work at your marriage. Now what he didn't mean was every time something happens in your marriage, that you need to go back to square one and work it all out again.

He says, this is a continuing process. Work at it. So what Paul is saying here, and in what manner are they to do that? Casually?

[12 : 32] No, reverently. The sense of awe. Do you see it there? Sense of awe at who God is. That Jesus Christ has brought them into the presence of, and into a relationship with, their holy Father.

I'm always reminded of when Lucy and Mr. Tumnus speak of Vaslan, what do they say? That he is not a tame lion, but he is good. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

Now here's the question we need to ask ourselves at this point. Paul wants these Christians, these Christians in Philippi, to work out their salvation, to live worthy lives. But as they seek to do that, here's the question that we may be thinking as we look at these verses.

Who is doing what? Who is doing what? Is it all up to them to live this life worthy of the gospel? Or is it all up to God to make them live this life worthy of the gospel?

Well, here is one of the most beautiful paradoxical truths about the Christian life. Look at Paul explaining the how of the growth.

[13 : 43] Look at what he writes. At the end of verse 12, they have to work at their faith. Do you see it? They have to work it out. They have to work at their faith.

They have to nurture their devotional life and their love for the Lord Jesus. They have to read their Bibles. They have to grow in knowledge. They have to resolve to pray.

They have to be the ones that extend forgiveness to their brothers and sisters. They are to be the ones who are zealous for good works. They have to work at their faith.

But at verse 13, they need to work at their faith all the while knowing that God is at work in them.

And this takes us to consider the wear of this growth. Now notice the breathtaking thought that Paul just drops in here at verse 13. It's a stunning thought.

[14 : 41] That their efforts as they strive to live out their faith are not only being carried out in the very presence of God, but are in fact the very efforts of God himself working in them by his spirit to produce the very desires to work and to will for his good pleasure.

And just as we think about that, that is a staggering truth. I just want you to be encouraged here this morning I want you to be encouraged as you look at these verses about God's commitment to you as one of his children, to your growth.

And God is not like the parent at school sports day, saying it's all over to you now, son and daughter. Listen, I'll be here on the sidelines cheering you on, but it's all up to you. I always think it's a bit like, it's a bit like Holmes under the hammer.

Alex, my wife and I, we love to watch that show. Just to give you a little insight into the rock and roll lifestyle that we're leading. The presenter goes to survey the property.

He turns to the camera, would you check out the state of this place? Who in their right mind would take this mess on? The person buys the property, comes in and says, listen, I know all you can see here is mess.

[16 : 01] I know this is messy. But here is the plan for what I'm going to transform this into. When God saved us, we were messy. And we are messy.

And we will always be messy. But when God saved us, he put his spirit into our lives. And he sent him there, not to be a casual occupier, but to be a permanent dweller.

And he did so not aimlessly. He did so with a plan. And that plan was not to turn a two bed into a four bed with a nice little kitchen and conservatory. He's in the business of transforming his people into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

And notice the why. Why does God do this in the lives of his people? Well, check out the two words at the end of that verse. Why does he do it? For his good pleasure.

In his strength, as his people grow, as they flourish, as he watches them make decisions that honor him, it delights him.

[17 : 03] So you work at your salvation with fear and trembling, Christian, says Paul. You work at it. All the while knowing that God is at work in you.

Now this is not 50-50. This is not us and God do it. We tag team here to make up 100. This is 100% you work and 100% God is at work in you.

And that's a beautiful truth for our Christian lives. J.I. Packer said the motto for the Christian life is not let go and let God, but trust God and get going.

Trust God and get going. So there's step two for the game plan for growth. Paul presents them with a plan. And third step, verses 14 to 17, what Paul does is he paints a picture.

He paints a picture, as people have alluded to already in the service this morning. He paints a picture and he says, would you see how beautiful the church can be? Again, I just want us to really quickly see the what, the how, the where, and the why of this picture.

[18 : 08] What does he want them to be? Verse 15. Shining lights. It's a beautiful image. Shining lights. And where does he want them to shine?

We'll look at some of the words that he uses. In the world. Among whom you shine. In the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. You get the point, right?

If we're reading this, if you're flipping, I get the point. Paul doesn't want these Christians in Philippi to retreat from the world. Withdraw to a holy huddle. Having nothing to do with the darkness round about them.

And very much keeping the light to themselves. He doesn't want them to do that. Retreat is not an option. But nor does he want these Christians to conform so much to the worlds.

That they just become like everyone else. They have the same dreams. They have the same ambitions. They behave the same. They have the same attitudes. So much so that actually if you look to them, they wouldn't be any different from the world round about them.

[19 : 10] Indistinguishable. What does Paul want? He wants them to be holy. And he wants them to be in the world. Be in the world.

But do not be of the world. Be in the darkness. But as you're in the darkness, be a light in the darkness. Shine for Christ.

And be something bright and beautiful. Shine for Christ and be something distinctive and attractive. Shine for Christ and seek to make an impact on the darkness with the light of Christ.

This is what he's saying. Amongst other things, it's a navigational metaphor. This guy spent a lot of time in his life on ships traveling.

What would they do? People on the ships, they would look at the stars in order to help them navigate as to where they're going to go. Do you see what he's saying? Be that light that people look at. And as they look at it and lead it, are directed in the direction of safety and life.

[20 : 19] Is this not a very attractive picture? Of how the church is meant to relate to the world?

Is this not a very beautiful picture as we think about our church? As we think about our lives individually where God has placed us and corporately together? Is this not a beautiful thought about what we're supposed to be doing?

Paul says, shine. In your darkness, shine. And how are they going to shine? How are they going to do it?

What are the practical things they're going to do that are going to help them shine? Well, let me just, as we bring it to a close this morning, let me just draw your attention to the imperatives that he uses here.

And I think this is where it becomes very practical for us this morning. And I'll try and draw a few of the applications as we go through them, but maybe have a think in your own lives what this is going to look like.

[21 : 21] So very quickly, firstly, verse 14, what does he say? How are they going to shine? By being people who do all things without grumbling and questioning.

Paul thinking back here to that grumbling Exodus generation, who were not the shining lights to the surrounding nations that God intended them to be.

And I think Paul is striking right at the heart here some of the internal issues that he's probably heard about are going on in this church. Some of the disputes, some of the disagreements, some of the differences that are causing friction.

What does he say? Guys, come to the cross. Come to the cross. Drink in your Savior. Drink in your Savior. And allow that to shape your mind. Put that behavior. Act like Christ.

Not only will that help their church community. Think about that. Not only will that help that church community. But what a difference. And how different they will look in the world round about them.

[22 : 23] What does that mean? Think about our world today. Our world loves grumbling. I read a survey this week that showed that the average Brit moans 70 times a week.

I've no idea how you work that out. 70 times a week. It gets better. 11 times on a weekday. And 16 times at the weekend. I don't know what happens at the weekend.

And at least three times before people have left the house in the morning. That's our world. Seems that Victor Meldrew is a lot closer to home than we care to admit.

But how different, how counter-cultural will we look in our world simply by not grumbling and not questioning like everyone else? Secondly, verse 15, and we'll rattle through these by being people who are blameless, pure, and without blemish.

A people who are striving for purity, who are striving for holiness. Why? Because they are striving for Christ. That they are pursuing a lifestyle that not only fits with the holy God who they claim to know and represent, but the holy God who has made them his own and who has called them to be his children and be holy.

[23 : 38] Thirdly, verse 16, by being people who hold fast to the word of life. Holding to the truth of God's word with both hands. Never letting it go.

Fixing their eyes on it. Savoring it. Allowing it to shape the way that they think. And as they do that, not holding it out in front of them, as they do that, not clutching it to themselves, but holding it out with both hands so that the world round about can come and see where life is to be found.

I'm just thinking on it this week. How often does our world try and convince us that the opposite is actually true of this? That actually the world is enlightened.

The world is the white back sheet, if you like. The world is the white canvas. And you Christians, with you, Jesus, with your opinions, you're actually the black spots on that white canvas.

And see what Paul is saying here? Actually, it's the other way around. And the thing that should give us, and I hope that gives us great confidence as we take the gospel into our workplaces, into our sports teams, into our stairwells, to our neighbors, that actually what we're holding out here is not just man's opinions.

[24 : 55] What we're holding out is the word of life. Fourthly, verse 18, very quickly, what does he say? Be people who are glad and rejoice.

Now, obviously, that is the opposite of grumbling and questioning. And so Paul says, with all these things, he says, shine for the gospel. There is the beautiful picture that he paints.

Shine, says Paul. And very quickly notice the why. Why? Because it brings Paul great joy. Now, I've been struck with the language that Paul uses of himself at verse 17.

He will sacrifice everything of himself in the cause of seeing these Christians grow in their faith. And it made me just think. It made me think, Graham, how far, in all honesty, how far are you willing to go to see a brother and sister go forth and grow in their faith?

It would be one practical thing to do this week. In fact, before you go this morning is to think about how you could sacrifice something of your time this week in order to see somebody grow.

[26 : 07] Could maybe be even as simple as sacrificing 10 minutes of your day to committing yourself to praying for someone else in this church family. Something really practical to do this morning before you go.

Go up to somebody. Say, how can I be praying for you this week? And here is my commitment between now and next Sunday. Every day I'm going to spend 10 minutes of my day praying for you.

Doesn't that make a massive difference? How can we be sacrificing ourselves to see our brothers and sisters in this church grow? See the Philippians shine to see them grow and go for Christ.

It's going to bring Paul great joy and it's going to bring God great glory. Your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Paul points to a person, he presents a plan, and he paints a picture. As we close a few months back, it was a great joy to see James baptized.

[27 : 08] I wasn't here, but the amount of positive reports I heard was incredible. Just such a great time, wasn't it, to celebrate together what God has done in his life, but also what God is doing in this place.

And it was really interesting the week before he got baptized, he sent me his testimony, but he also sent me one of his friend's testimonies. Somebody who was actually getting baptized at the same time as him, but was getting baptized in a different church in the city.

And let me just read a portion of his testimony to you, with permission, and just think about what it means to shine in somebody's life.

So let me just read this to you, and we'll close with this. I wasn't born or raised in a Christian family. I failed religious studies at school, and my only notion of Jesus was the party-poopng Christ displayed in popular culture.

I spent the better part of 30 years taking complete control of my own life, and I was miserable. I felt lost and empty, and no amount of alcohol or debauchery could fill me up.

[28 : 16] I suffered from depression, and I tried to take my own life on several occasions. In July of last year, at a particular low point, I cried out, not knowing who might listen, and I made a promise that if things didn't pick up before the year was done, then I was done.

And he heard me. And things changed quickly following that anguished plea, and very much for the better. Little coincidences occurred that brought about improvements in my situation and my health.

And here's the bit to listen to. Then someone new started at my work, and she brought our loving God to my attention, and my interest was piqued.

And the rest of the story is how through the witness of his colleague, he investigates Christianity, encounters the gospel message, and he gives his life to Jesus Christ. But James said to me that, and I was reading it through, and I was really struck by how that colleague is described.

She brought our loving God to my attention. Now is that not a wonderful example of what it means to shine in the darkness, wherever God has placed us?

[29 : 32] To make our loving God, to make the living God, make him available, tell people about him? I find that so encouraging as I read that.

This is what it means to shine in the darkness. Sinclair Ferguson, and we will close with this, Sinclair Ferguson writes, As children, we learn to say, twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are.

Christians who are lights shining in the world's darkness will make others ask similar questions of them. You are the light of the world, so shine. Let's pray together.

So dear Father, we thank you so much, Lord, for this morning. And we thank you so much for your word. Father, that not only that we have it, but we have it in our language, that we can understand it.

Thank you so much for the wonderful promises and encouragements that we've seen in your word this morning. So Father, we ask that you would help us this week by your spirit who is at work in us to shine for the gospel.

[30 : 39] So Father, this is our prayer made in Jesus' worthy and precious name. Amen.