

Christ-Centred Witness

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[0 : 0 0] The scripture reading today comes from Philippians 2, verses 12 to 18. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God, without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

This is God's word. Thank you.

Thank you.

[2 : 0 8] Thank you.

There are work situations. There are geopolitical challenges all around the world. Politics in Hong Kong is at an interesting stage. We are living in unprecedented and interesting times.

And that is just the macro level. What about the personal level? Some of us are facing job loss or retrenchment. Some of us are facing financial insecurity.

All these relational challenges. Parenting is tough. Marriage can be difficult. These are challenging times for all of us. And no matter what your political stance, your socioeconomic status, your relational status, all of us find ourselves in unusual and unpredictable times.

And the question is, for those of us that are Christians, how are we to respond? What is it that God is calling us to do in the midst of these times?

[3 : 3 3] Now, I'm aware that maybe not all of us that are watching this morning would consider ourselves followers of Jesus. Maybe some of us are still trying to make sense of the claims of Christ and what Christianity is all about.

Well, if that's you, you're joining us at a great time because we're working as a church through the book of Philippians in our preaching series. And the book of Philippians is a wonderful book that describes what the Christian life looks like.

And one of the things that we discover is that in the book of Philippians, the apostle Paul, who wrote it, describes the Christian as someone who, because of their hope and their faith in Jesus, is learning to emulate or imitate Jesus for their life to become more like Jesus, which in many ways often looks like laying down our lives, surrendering our lives for the well-being of others.

And yet in that place, we find abundant life and overflowing joy. And this is what we saw last week, that Paul says, because of Jesus and his life, he's urging the Christians in Philippi to emulate Jesus.

Jesus, who, though he was God, didn't grasp at his Godness, but embraced with humility humanity, came and laid down his life, dying on a cross for the sins of the world.

[4 : 55] Paul says to Christians in Philippi, because your life is in Jesus, you too follow him and do the same. And so the question we're asking is this.

For those of us who are Christians, loving, trusting, obeying Jesus, learning to emulate or follow him, what does it look like to follow him in the midst of these challenging and unprecedented times?

When we are fearful about the future or our children's future, when our friends are talking about how hopeless life is or situation is, how should those of us that are centering our lives in Jesus respond?

Well, this is something that the Philippian Christians, and in fact all first century Christians, had to grapple with themselves. And the reason is, if you look at your Bible, our passage that we read this morning, in verse 15, Paul talks about how these Christians are living in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation.

It's a quote from the Old Testament that talks about how the whole of society has turned their back on the things of God and are wicked and rebellious. Everyone's living for themselves.

[6 : 06] There is violence in the community. It's not a very safe community to live in. And Paul's saying to the Christians in Philippi, this is the situation in which you live.

First century Christians knew that persecution was never far away, even imprisonment. We saw that two weeks ago, how Paul writes to these Philippians, and he says, Stand firm, even as you face constant opposition from those around you.

In fact, Paul himself is writing this letter from a prison cell, from jail. He's being persecuted for his faith. And he writes and he says, I'm actually not sure how this is going to turn out.

It may end in execution, and that's the end of my life. I may be released. But either way, Paul is learning to follow Jesus in the midst of it. Remember how one of the founding members of the Philippian church was the jailer that was overseeing Paul as he was in jail in the city of Philippi.

Paul and Silas are arrested because of their faith. And while they're there, they are not discouraged. They're not grumbling or complaining. They're worshiping God. And the jailer is so moved that he comes to faith.

[7 : 19] You could say that this Philippian church was planted in a jail cell. Talk about uncertain times. And yet this is something that Christians have always had to wrestle with.

Friends, what does it mean for those of us that are followers of Jesus to follow Jesus at this time? Well, in this passage, we're going to see three things. Three things that guide the Christian community, the church, through such times.

We're going to talk about the Christian's calling, the Christian's power, and the Christian's witness. So firstly, the Christian's calling or the church's calling.

Look at verse 12 with me in your Bibles. Now, I need to warn you. Paul is one of the world champions at writing long and complicated sentences. And this is one of them.

And so look at what he says. We'll try and make sense of it. He says, Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

[8 : 23] Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. That's what Paul's asking them to do. But what does that actually mean? Well, when Paul says, work out your salvation, he doesn't mean work it out like you work out a math sum or a coding problem.

He's not talking about solving the problem. He's also not talking about working for your salvation. As if Christianity is those who attain to a high moral status, who do all the right religious and Christian things, one day at the end of their life are rewarded with salvation.

The whole basis of Christianity is that it's a gift of grace, not on the basis of works. Not something you earn, but something that's attained for you because Jesus died on the cross for sinners such as us.

So Paul doesn't mean continue to work for your salvation in the hope that one day you'll be rewarded for your good works. The Greek word here that says work out actually means to carry out something which is conceptual, to bring something into an experienced, lived reality.

It's kind of like if somebody says they're going to come up with a healthy eating plan. They're going to go to gym three times a week. They're going to start eating healthily. They're going to cut out sugars. Well, that's all very good to talk about, but you actually need to put that in practice.

[9 : 47] You need to carry it out. You need to work out your healthy eating plan. Paul says work out, bring the concept, let it be a lived reality in your life.

And he then says work out your salvation. And what that means is the fact that once because Jesus died on the cross, your life has been changed. You now belong to him.

We sang earlier about how your life is hid with Christ. You are now part of Christ. You belong to him. Let that reality be worked out in your life.

Because you are saved, you've experienced salvation, you're now part of the people of God. And the book of Philippians, that means your life is now centered on Jesus, emulating, imitating his life.

And so a Christian is not just someone who is trying to be moral or religious. A Christian is someone who, having trusted in Jesus and his death on the cross, is now living out that faith in Jesus, trusting him and obeying him, centering their lives on him, learning to imitate and become more like Jesus.

[10 : 56] And so Paul says work out, live out that reality, that gospel salvation that God has done in you. So what is verse 12 saying? My dearly beloved, my dear friends, writes Paul, just as you've always done, so continue to do, not only when I was with you, but even now that I'm not with you, continue to live out, get on with carrying out this reality of your life with Jesus, your Christ-centered obedience to Jesus.

Now, that doesn't sound very profound. I mean, come on, it's got to give us something more interesting than that. But think about it. When life is easy, when life is comfortable, when the job is secure, when politics are pretty stable, nothing interesting going on, when there's no infectious diseases floating around, it's pretty easy to follow Jesus.

Life, just carry on and do your thing. But what happens when life becomes unpredictable? Uncomfortable. What happens when COVID upends all your plans and challenges everything?

What happens when parenting is tough and finances are tight? What happens when everything is up in the air or you feel frightened about the future or your children's future?

What do you do when you're persecuted for your faith because you're loving and trusting Jesus? Paul writes, and he says, In the midst of unpredictable and challenging times, don't relegate your faith to something that you do when life is easy.

[12 : 39] In the midst of that, work out your salvation. Carry on your life centered on Jesus. Your Christ-centered obedience. When life is challenging and unpredictable, fasten the anchor of your soul to this and live out your faith.

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Centering your life on him. Make him Lord. Imitate his life. Lay down your life. When you're tempted to retreat into self-preservation.

When you're tempted to just look after yourself. Carry on imitating Jesus. Lay down your life to serve others. Keep serving the poor and the marginalized.

Keep supporting missionaries overseas. Keep evangelizing the lost. Telling them about the hope of Jesus. Carry on opening up your home. Hosting others.

Serving them. Pour out your life looking not only to your own interests but to the interests of others. Imitate Jesus in Christ-centered obedience.

[13 : 42] Friends, in unprecedented times when the challenge is on, the temptation is to withdraw. And Paul says in these times continue living for the glory of God by centering our lives on Christ.

Work out your salvation. In the midst of these times. And then he says, do so with fear and trembling. And it's a phrase that Paul uses a couple of times in the New Testament.

And it means a couple of things. But what it means primarily is do so without a sense of self-assuredness. Without self-confidence. Without feeling like I've got this thing.

I've got this under control. Do so with a sense of humility before God. But it also means to fear God means to be more in awe of who God is than the circumstances around us.

In Ephesians 6, Paul writes and he says, serve your masters with fear and trembling. In other words, be more in awe of God. Fear God more than your masters around you. Work out our salvation with fear and trembling means to go into life aware of who Christ is.

[14 : 53] With a sense of awe at the majesty of God more than being trembling at the circumstances of what's going on in our world around us.

And look at how Paul says in verse 12. He starts off saying, therefore. What's the basis? Why should Christians do this? Well, it's because of everything that he said before.

Which we looked at last week. Last week he says, because Jesus, who by very nature was God, didn't grasp or exploit his godness. But he, in humility, laid down his majesty.

He embraced humanity. He died on the cross. But he didn't stay there. Through Christ's resurrection, his shameful death was reversed.

And now God has highly exalted him to the heavens. Seated at the right hand of God. He has been given the name that is above every name. The title that is above every title.

[15 : 51] He is called Lord God. And before him, one day, every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess. And therefore, dear brothers and sisters, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

Because Christ is in heaven. Because Christ is seated in the heavens. And is God. And is Lord God over all creation. Before whom one day every knee will bow. And every tongue will confess.

And acknowledge that he is God. Therefore, friends, when challenging times come. And unprecedented occasions come. And the challenges of life. Carry on living out your Christ-centered obedience to Jesus.

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. This is the Christian's calling. Friends, let's not retreat. Let's not pull back. Let's not just think about how we can get through.

Let's work out the calling that God's got for those of us that are Christ's. Second thing is this. The Christian's power. Or the church's power.

[16 : 54] Now, verse 12, which we've just looked at, is a challenging verse. For some of us, maybe, that just feels like one more burden to add to an already exhausting life.

Maybe you feel like life is stressful enough as it is. I've got work stress. I've got financial stress. I've got COVID stress. There's political upheaval.

I've got family stress. And now you're asking me to pull up my bootstraps. To sort myself out. To keep on going.

Now it feels like as if God is coming to me. On top of everything else. And saying, hey, stop slacking. I'm watching you. But friends, look at verse 13 with us.

He says, work out your salvation. Your Christ-centered obedience. For, verse 13. Because it is God who works in you.

[17 : 59] Both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Every parent gets to this stage in life when they realize they need to start teaching their children to do some chores around the house.

Or at least helping their kids realize that mom and dad are not the servants that do everything for their children. In our family recently, we are trying to teach our children to make their own beds in the morning.

And when we first introduced this to our kids, we were met with great protests. I don't know how to do it. I can't do it. It's too hard. And so we said, come, we'll do it with you.

We will show you how to do it. Now, in the beginning, who do you think was really making the beds? We were, right? And in many ways, it would have been easier just to do it ourselves.

Maybe you've had this experience where you're trying to teach your kids to do something new. To ride a bicycle or to learn to rollerblade or to ice skate. Something like that.

[19 : 09] And the first few times, you're actually the one that's doing all the hard work. I remember teaching my kids to ride a bicycle. And running around the streets, holding onto this bicycle.

Keeping them upright. Propelling them forward as they're learning to ride. But what does every parent say to their kids after the first few times? Even though you're the one that's done all the hard work.

And actually the one that's done it all. Every parent says, well done. You see, you can do it. You're doing so well. Look what Paul says here.

He says, Christian, work out your salvation. For it is God who, by the Holy Spirit, works in you to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The word work here is the Greek word *energen*. From where in English we get our word energy. Well, God calls his people to carry on working out God's calling on their life.

[20 : 15] Even in the midst of unsettling and challenging times. At the same time, God promises that by his grace, he's actually the one that's energizing, empowering, at work in his people.

Helping them, causing them to actually be the ones that can work out their salvation. And notice how God is both at work in our desires, what Paul calls our will, as well as the one empowering us to actually do it.

Friends, some of us here may feel worn out and exhausted by everything that's going on. You desire to be faithful to Jesus. You desire to work out your calling.

You want to live out your Christ-centered obedience. But friends, it just feels so exhausted. You feel worn out. You don't feel like you've got anything left to give. And when you hear that, you feel like it's one more burden.

Friends, the good news, the grace of God is this. That God is at work within you. Even that desire to want to do it is the grace of God within you. That's the Holy Spirit at work within you.

[21 : 20] That's God coming alongside you. The life that God calls Christians to live out is not just obedience to some set of rules that regulate our behavior so that we can be good moral people.

Rather, the life of a Christian that God calls us to, to work out our salvation, belonging to Christ means to be truly converted. It means having our lives indwelt by God's Holy Spirit so that the Spirit of Jesus is now at work within us, transforming our hearts and our minds and our wills so that we're learning to center our lives on Him and live out our obedience, becoming like Him.

But all of this is the work of God through the Holy Spirit. This is the grace of God. In verse 17, Paul talks about his life as running a race.

Imagine you're running a marathon. And you know you're near the end, but you just can't imagine how much further you can keep on going. Your legs feel like jello.

You feel exhausted. You've got nothing left in the tank. And someone in the stands shout out, Keep going! You've just got two more kilometers to go! And you hear that and you feel, I can't do it.

[22 : 39] I can't take another step. And just at that moment, somebody comes and runs and puts their arm around you. And they lift up the weight off your legs.

And they run with you, essentially carrying you over the finishing line. Friends, when you hear Paul saying, In the midst of all that's going on, Keep going!

Live out your Christ-centered obedience to Jesus. You might hear that and feel like an exhausted marathon runner. And you hear that and you feel like God is in the stands saying, Keep going!

Only another 200 kilometers! And you might want to say, Shut up! You don't know what it feels like. It's easy for you to shout that from the stands. I'm the one in the middle of it.

Friends, Jesus is not in the stands saying, Keep going! I'm watching you! Jesus is not a schoolmaster that's checking off the scoreboard to see how you're doing. Friends, Jesus got into the ring with you.

[23 : 35] And he's carrying you. And he promises to pour out his Holy Spirit upon you. To be at work within you. To cause you. To help you. And to center your life in him. Jesus gives you the Holy Spirit.

He's there with you in the ring. Hebrews says that because Jesus laid aside his divinity and took on our humanity, Jesus knows everything that we're going through.

He's been tempted in every way that you and I have. Jesus knows what it's like to be exhausted, to be abandoned by friends, to look at the cross and to think, I don't know if I can do it.

Friends, Jesus climbed into the ring with us. Though he was God, he didn't grasp at his Godness. He didn't hold on to his divinity. But he laid his majesty aside.

He humbled himself. He took on humanity. And he took on the cross. Friends, but Jesus didn't just stay dead.

[24 : 34] He rose again. And when he rose again, before he ascended to the Father, he said to his disciples, I've got a calling for you, for you to be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea.

To the ends of the earth, I've got a calling for you. But wait here until I give you the Holy Spirit. I'm not calling you to live out your calling, your own strength. Don't do so with self-confidence or self-assured.

In fear and trembling, in humility, in dependence upon me, I give you my strength. I'll let work within you, calling you and empowering you to live out my calling.

Friends, this is the grace of God. If you this morning feel exhausted and worn out, you feel you have no energy, no strength left, Jesus is empowering you. He is at work within you to will and to work according to his good pleasure.

This is the church's grace, a Christian's grace. Thirdly and finally, the church's witness. Now, in challenging times and unprecedented times, when opposition or persecution comes, when we are fearful about the future and our lives and circumstances, one of the temptations is for division to occur, for maybe grumbling or complaining to take place.

[25 : 56] Chris spoke about this a few weeks ago. We're in chapter one. Paul says, I want you to be of one heart, one mind, contending together, standing unified for the gospel.

And part of the reason why Paul said that is because when opposition comes, it can easily cause division or fracturing. One group thinks we should respond like this. One group thinks we should respond like that.

And there can be differences that occur. Well, look at what Paul says in verse 14. He says this, Do all things without grumbling and disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, that's Christ, that in the day of Christ, I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

Paul knows that in extraordinary times like these, in which the Philippians are living, the challenge is that they're facing the world, which are hostile to their faith. He has the ability to divide them and separate them, maybe causing arguing or complaining amongst them, disputing and differences of opinion.

And so he says, Don't go down that road. Do all things without arguing or disputing. Maybe they weren't so much arguing or fighting, but they're having lost sight of the majesty and the beauty of Jesus and who he is.

[27 : 28] Because they are more aware of the challenges of life than they are of the hope found in Jesus. And so their speech is marked by grumbling, complaining. Why does this have to happen to us?

Why do I have to be the one to do it? Why are these things coming our way? And Paul's point here is that when Christians go around either grumbling or complaining or moaning, always negative about how hard and difficult life is, Paul's point is how different really are we from the rest of society?

And if we know different from the rest of society, how real is our hope in Jesus? Conversely, he says, There's a very famous story, Chris reminded me about it this week, of John Wesley.

John Wesley was a Christian pastor. He was an Anglican minister about 300 years ago in England. And later on in his life, God used him powerfully to bring revival, a kind of spiritual awakening to England and then to America as well.

He was the man that started the Methodist church 300 years ago. He wrote over 6,500 hymns. Many of them are still being sung today. And God really used him powerfully.

[29 : 12] But earlier on in his life, he was a young man. He was a recently ordained minister in the Anglican church. And he and his brother were sent to America as kind of missionaries to America.

And while they're there, while they're on the way there, on the ship that they're traveling on, hits a massive storm. And everyone on the ship thinks that they're going to die.

They're convinced the ship is going to sink. They've lived their last days. They're about to die. And so people are paranoid and freaking out and screaming and crying. And there's pandemonium all over the ship.

But on the ship, there's a group of German immigrants that are making their way to America. And they are Christians. They are from the area of Germany, Moravia. They are these Moravian Christians.

And while everyone else is screaming and crying and pandemonium, convinced they're going to die, these Moravian Christians come together and start singing songs of praise.

[30 : 12] And they're looking at God's word. Listen to how John Wesley describes it in his journal a few weeks later. He says, In the midst of singing the psalm with which their service began, the sea broke over.

It split the main sail in pieces. It covered the ship and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep sea had already swallowed us up.

A terrible screaming began amongst us English. The Moravian Christians, however, calmly sang on. I asked one of them afterwards, Were you not afraid?

He answered, I thank God that I was not. I asked, But what about your women and children? Were they not afraid? He mildly replied, No, our women and children are not afraid to die.

The storm was boisterous. But the Moravians, they just kept on praising God. A few hours later, the storm subsides, and Wesley finds himself wondering, What is it about these Christians that allowed them such peace that they could carry on with worshipping God in the midst of this storm that they all thought they were going to die?

[31 : 26] Later on, he gets to America, and he finds a Moravian pastor, and he's asking this pastor about this deep-seated faith. And this pastor asks Wesley, he says, Wesley, Wesley, do you really know Jesus?

Have you encountered his love and his grace? Has your life been converted? John Wesley, are you truly born again? Do you know the Lord Jesus? And Wesley writes in his journal, he says, I said yes, but I fear that the words were spoken in vain.

About two years later, John Wesley is still rumor, John Wesley is still rumorating over these things. And he goes to a Moravian church meeting one night in Aldersgate.

And while he's there, he encounters the living God. And Jesus breaks into his life and changes his life radically. And he writes in his journal, he says, John Wesley walked out of that meeting, a different man, and he says, that God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.

I did feel, I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation. I felt an assurance was given to me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and that I was saved from sin and death.

[32 : 47] John Wesley walked out of that meeting, a different man. And from there on, God used him powerfully and changed the spiritual landscape of England and America for the next 150 years.

But you see how it all started? It all started because here was a man, a religious man, a minister, someone who prayed and read the Bible and knew the theory in his head.

But here was a man who saw the faith of a bunch of Christians who were holding fast to Christ in the midst of the storms of life and the literal, the storms on the ship in challenging and scary and fearful times.

Here were a bunch of Christians that were holding fast to Christ and it made John Wesley wonder, why don't I have faith like them? These lives were like stars that were shining in the midst of a dark and deceptive world.

Friends, these lives challenged John Wesley. And so look at what Paul says here in Philippians. He says in verse 16 that as you hold fast to the word of faith, your lives will do the same.

[33 : 57] You will be like lights that shine in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. Paul's being quite clever here because the word to hold fast actually has double meaning.

It could mean to hold fast onto something, but it could also mean to hold something else as an offer to somebody else. What does Paul mean here? Is he saying as you hold fast to Christ or as you hold Christ out to others?

Well, actually he means both, doesn't he? As you hold fast to Christ, your life will preach the gospel. As you hold fast to Jesus in the midst of challenging and uncertain times, as you work out your salvation, your Christ-centered obedience, your life will preach the gospel.

You will hold out the offer of grace to others. That's what John Wesley found 300 years ago. That's what so many others have found as well. And of course, that's how the Philippian church began because Paul and Silas are in jail.

And rather than grumbling and complaining, rather than disputing and arguing, they're sitting in the jail cell, singing praise and worship to God. And the jailer turns to them and says, who are you and who is your God?

[35 : 11] Friends, as we hold fast to Christ, we will also hold him out to a desperate and longing world. Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, Watermark Church, those that are looking into the claims of Christ, as you have obeyed, so now not only in our absence, as we can't meet together, not only, sorry, in our presence and when we meet together face to face, but even in our absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, knowing it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So let's pray together. Lord Jesus Christ, we come before you in prayer now, not just because this is a good thing to do at the end of the sermon, we do this because we need you.

God, we recognize your call in our life at this time to work out our salvation, to give ourselves wholeheartedly to Christ-centered obedience. But Jesus, we need your grace.

We need you to be at work within us. God, won't you give us the Holy Spirit? Won't you pour out your Holy Spirit upon us? God, those that are anxious and weary, tired and exhausted, those who feel like we've got nothing left to give, God, I pray even now in our homes, in our living rooms and our bedrooms, God, won't you pour out your Holy Spirit upon us?

Even now, God, strengthen us. Be at work within us. Amen. Come, Holy Spirit.

[36 : 42] Come and strengthen and encourage us and fix our eyes on Jesus. Come and remind us of the hope of the gospel.

Help us, Lord Jesus, to hold fast to the word of life. Help us, God, to stand out as we fix our eyes on you.

I love you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.