

Philippians 2:12-30

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Date: 05 February 2023

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[0 : 00] Philippians 2 verses 12-13. So the epistle to the Philippians has often been referred to as an epistle of joy.

! It's not really hard to see that as you read through it. and there's a big emphasis just on the word joy or rejoice. And that word joy comes up 15 times in the letter.

And you notice how Paul begins this particular chapter. Look at chapter 2 and verse 2. He says, complete my joy. Complete my joy by being of the same mind.

It's as if Paul is throwing out a kind of challenge to us, to the church there. Make my joy complete. Make my joy complete. How do you do that? How do you experience the joy that Paul is talking about here?

In Sunday school, you learn how you spell joy is important. You spell joy very, very simply. It's J-O-Y, isn't it?

[1 : 06] Jesus first. Others next. Yourself last. Jesus first. Others next. Yourself last.

That's not a bad lesson, is it? That's not a bad lesson in how to know the Lord. How to know the joy of the Lord. If you want complete joy, you put Jesus first.

Others next. Yourself last. But most people don't live like that today. Most people put themselves first and get very, very frustrated when other people get in the way.

And they hardly give Jesus a thought. And if you live like that, you don't get joy. What do you get? You get yodge. I don't know what that is. So what does it mean to put Jesus first?

Others next and ourselves last. And Paul is going to tell us about that in the rest of chapter 2. Paul is going to tell us how to work that out. That is what the therefore is there for in verse 12.

[2 : 11] Verse 12 and 13 in many ways are our text. But they'll help us understand the whole chapter. So look at verse 12 with me. Therefore, my beloved, as you've always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Paul isn't talking to you as an individual.

And we often read the New Testament like that, but he's not talking to kind of just the individuals. He's talking to the congregation. I suppose if we were from the south of America, we would say y'all, wouldn't we?

Oh, y'all. He's talking to the church. To the Philippians. And he's saying to the Philippians, you need to work out amongst yourselves the implications of what Jesus has done for you.

We saw that, didn't we, so helpfully last week, as Reuben preached on that beautiful gospel hymn in verses 5 to 11. That Jesus humbled himself. He made himself obedient, even to death on a cross.

[3 : 20] Because he died, and yet God has now exalted him and raised him to the highest place. And ultimately, every knee will bow to him. And every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And Paul is saying to the church at Philippi, he's saying, you need to work that out as a church. You need to work out the implications of that.

You need to work out your salvation. But notice, he's not saying, work for your salvation. He doesn't say that. If you think that you have to work for your salvation, then can I kindly say, you've not understood the gospel at all.

The gospel is good news, and working for your salvation is not good news. It's like being the hamster caught on the wheel. It's like being on the treadmill, going round and round and round and getting nowhere.

If you have to put yourself right with God, you'll never get there. If you've got to work for your salvation, you'll never make it. You'll never be sure you've done enough.

[4 : 29] And so somebody has said, isn't he, that the difference between Christianity and all other religions is just two letters. Every world religion says, do this, do that.

But Christianity says what? Christianity says, it's done. It is done. When Jesus died on the cross, he cried out with a loud voice, it is done.

It is finished. It is satisfied. It is accomplished. There is nothing more to do. And Paul says, to you and to me, work out the implications of that.

Work out the implications of what it means to be saved. I don't know if you've ever done that. Paul is saying, work out the implications of what Christ has done for you amongst yourselves.

It's one of the reasons why hospitality is so important. those opportunities to sit around a table and to discuss the truths of the faith.

[5 : 43] To discuss the issues that we face in our lives living as Christians. It's one of the reasons why house groups are so important, isn't it? Because we can do this together. We get the Bible open and we say, how does this apply to my life?

Where we live. I don't know if you've ever had somebody come alongside you and show you how to live the Christian life. You can be told, can't you?

You can listen to sermons. You can be given a good book. You can have a course in Christian doctrine. And you can understand all of that. that very often, nearly always, you need someone to come along and show you.

Those first steps as a Christian, maybe as a Christian parent, as a Christian married couple, you need someone to show you, to work out what Jesus has done for you.

And that's what Paul is talking about. It's very, very practical. So work out your own salvation with fear and trembling because God is amongst you. work out what God has done for you in Christ.

[6 : 58] And notice, it's your own salvation and not someone else's. It's very tempting, isn't it, I find? To think about someone else if only they understood that.

If only they got this. I better give them a book. Or why don't they do something like this or something like that? We often talk like that.

I love that episode at the end of John's Gospel where Peter has been restored. He's fallen into sin and Christ has restored him. Peter's come back to the faith and the first thing that Peter does when Jesus says, follow me, the first thing Peter does is he looks over his shoulder and he sees John, the disciple whom Jesus loves.

and Peter says, what about him, Lord? And Jesus says, nothing to do with you. Mind your own business.

You follow me. It's your salvation that you have to work out. John will work out salvation for himself. Work out your own salvation. I came across a story this week.

[8 : 12] There was a minister who became aware that in the church where he was serving, all the women were doing all the work. That's not unusual, sadly, in many churches.

Unfortunately, that's often true. It's great that the women are so committed. But the men often take a back seat. And so the minister thought I better do something about this.

And so he chose the following Sunday, the following hymn, take my life and let it be. You know that's him? Him? And he changed the verses without telling anyone.

And he got the men to sing the verse first. And instead of saying take my life and let it be, on the screen came up take my wife and let me be. I suspect they got the message.

Work out your own salvation. Where it fits into this. How are you going to live this out? How are you going to serve in Christ's church?

[9 : 18] What are the implications of this massive grace of God in Christ for you? Work out. It's continuous, isn't it?

It's ongoing. He says, as you've always obeyed, not only in my presence but how much more in my absence. Continue now to work out your salvation whether I'm here or not.

That's the acid test, isn't it? It's the acid test of my Christianity and yours. Who are we trying to impress? What are you like when no one's watching you?

It's one thing, isn't it, to be an obedient and full-on Christian when there's an apostle breathing down your neck. What happens when there's nobody watching? It's pretty easy, isn't it, to pretend to be an all-out Christian when we come together on Sundays.

When we're all together and we sing the great hymns and psalms but what happens on a Monday and the rest of the week when no one's really looking? But of course, that's never true, is it? [10:27] Who are we trying to impress? I love that summary in Hebrews of the life and the career of Moses. In Hebrews 11, that great chapter on heroes of the faith, do you remember what it says about Moses?

It says, Moses refused to be known as a son of Pharaoh's daughter. That's a pretty big deal when you think about it. The historians tell us that Moses might well have become a Pharaoh. He could have been buried under some great, great pyramid in the desert somewhere and hundreds of, thousands of years later, some archaeologist could have come and unwrapped the mummy in the corpse, carbon dated him, worked out which Pharaoh he particularly happened to be.

But everyone knows Moses. Everyone's heard of Moses, haven't they? it's a pretty big deal for him to refuse to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

It says that he chose to be mistreated with the people of God. He chose to identify himself with a slave people, with an oppressed people, a people facing genocide, with the people who are being persecuted and mistreated.

[11:46] He chose to be there amongst them. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as greater value than all the treasures of Egypt.

He left Egypt, we're talking about fearing the king's anger. He led the people out of slavery, out of Egypt, out of the wilderness, into the promised land. And the phrase that the writer to the Hebrews uses to explain all of that is a really powerful phrase.

He did all that. He chose, he left, seeing him who was invisible. Seeing him who was invisible. He lived coram deo, before the face of God.

That's where Moses lived. And that's where you and I are to live out the Christian life, before the face of God. So that the smile of God matters far more to us than the frown of Pharaoh.

And the frown of God has a far greater influence upon us than the sniggering and the laughter of maybe our friends in school or at work. And so truly this is what Paul means when he talks about fear and trembling.

[13:03] We're not fearful that we might lose our salvation. Look at chapter 1 and verse 6. It says, I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

God doesn't do things by half. When he begins a good work in you, he will bring it to completion. So if you're trusting in the Lord Jesus this morning and you've banked your life on him, you don't have to be fearful about your salvation.

Fear and trembling is Bible language for the presence of God. And so when people come before God into the presence of God, they don't come with their hands in their pockets.

They don't just saunter in and talk to the guy upstairs. That's not what happens. They fall on their faces before him trembling with awe and with reverence.

And that's what Paul is talking about. He's saying live in the light of who God is. And so IPC Ealing, work out your salvation together, the implications of what Jesus has done for you.

[14:15] What he's done for you on the cross and you do it with fear and trembling knowing that you live before the face of God. Osginis talks about, in one of his books he's a writer, he talks about the audience of one.

He says most of us, whether we're aware of it or not, do things with an eye to the approval of some audience or another. The question is not whether we have an audience but which audience to which we're playing.

And he mentions people who've been obsessed with the praise of men. He mentions the singer Marlene Dietrich, for example, who used to record the applause at her concerts and then play it back at dinner parties to her guests, telling them which city the round of applause came from. And we think that's ridiculous, that's extreme, isn't it? But we all play it, we're all looking for applause somewhere. We put our posts on Instagram or Facebook and no one favourites or likes them.

We're just slightly put out. We do something quietly in the background, hoping for applause or hoping for congratulations but we don't get it.

[15 : 40] We all live our lives before an audience of one. That's as Moses did. And so the only applause that should matter to us is the applause of God.

And it's his smile, his frown that counts and we have every incentive to do it. Look at verse 13. For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

I sometimes think the end of that is used as an excuse. People say, well if I became a Christian I just couldn't keep it up. If I became a Christian I just let him down and I'll disappoint him and I'll disappoint everyone else.

I could never be a Christian. But do you see what happens when you come to the point where you give up when you come to the point where you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and him alone and you lean on him and you rest on him and you rely on him and you confess that Jesus Christ is Lord do you know what happens?

The spirit of the Lord Jesus comes to live in you so that you begin to want what you never wanted before. And God is at work within you now to live according to his good pleasure.

[17 : 04] It's not that as a Christian you're on cruise control and you can let go and let God take over. No that's not what it's saying. The Christian life is 100% you and 100% God.

And so you work out your own salvation. It's hard work. Think about it. Discuss it amongst yourselves. Speak to an older wiser Christian. Apply it. Work out your own salvation.

And as you do that God is at work within you and amongst you. It's a lovely illustration. I think it's a preacher's illustration. Sadly I don't think it's true.

But never let that get in the way of a good illustration. Alright? It's the little boy little boy went to a concert with his mum and the little boy is learning to play the piano and his mum thought it would be really great for him to hear a master a concert pianist so she took him to the theatre and while her back was turned she was talking to some friends the little boy hopped up on the stage and the curtains opened the spotlights and the floodlights came on and there's this little boy standing at a Steinway grand piano in the middle of the stage playing Twinkle Twinkle Little Star and then out of the wings comes Paderewski the concert pianist and he comes right up close to this little boy and he whispered in his ear keep playing keep playing and then with his left hand he begins to play some bass notes and then he comes around with his right arm and he starts running an oblige and before you know it something that could have been extremely embarrassing is something beautiful something beautiful the old master and the young novice transformed a frightening situation into a wonderfully creative experience the audience is mesmerized and that is the Christian life that is what

Paul is talking about here what a mess what a mess I would make of the Christian life if it was just me how frightening it would be for you if just you had to do it how embarrassing it would be how disappointing to God no no as you twinkle twinkle little star on your piano as you work out how to live the Christian life baby steps in those directions the Lord himself comes and he works with us and through us so that we begin to want and we begin to do his good pleasure and that is the Christian life and so that raises the question well what is God's good pleasure he spells it out in verses 14 to 18 I'm going to call that courageous Christianity and then he fleshes it out in verses 19 to 30 and I'm going to call that contagious Christianity two points in ten minutes alright so what is God's great pleasure what is

[20 : 25] God's great purpose verse 13 for what purpose did Jesus come into the world why did God allow his son his darling son to go to the cross what is the purpose what is the mind of Christ Paul says let this mind be in you that was in Christ what is it well in verses 14 to 19 he speaks about shining as stars in the night sky verse 14 he says we live in a really wicked and corrupt generation I don't know what it's like in your workplace there's possibly great arguments and quarrels and disputes and cold wars and power plays and Paul says something remarkable doesn't he in verse 14 he says do all things without grumbling or disputing and we live in a world where everyone grumbles or moans about everything

I sometimes think I've got the spiritual gift of grumbling you just start me off and I can go 20 minutes half an hour Paul says the Christian church is different it is different I think it's right occasionally to say to one another just stop grumbling just stop grumbling stands out doesn't it you go out into the countryside it's not so much in London but you go into the countryside there's a blackness of the sky and the stars shine so brightly this deep darkness and stars shining out that's the picture it's probably taken from Daniel chapter 12 chapter 12 of Daniel Daniel says those who lead many to righteousness will shine like stars and that's

God's purpose for the church that's God's purpose for us when we're together as a group of Christians that we're not moaning we're not grumbling we're not putting ourselves forward we're putting others forward and that's God's purpose for us as we live out the implications of the gospel in our personal lives in our family lives in our church life that we might point many to righteousness this is God's heart for healing hundreds and thousands of people living in deep deep darkness and they're not putting Jesus first they are putting themselves first and they are without hope and without God in the world and God has called us and placed us here so that we might point many to righteousness and so let your imagination run riot you fly into London or you fly into another city it's probably better and you see little pricks of light and each light as you fly in over a city you know there's a community living there there's a household there's light in that place think of that spiritually that is

God's purpose he wants to see healing he wants to see London with these bright light shining in a dark sky churches where people are sharing their lives and serving Christ little pinpricks of light from which the gospel goes out work that out he says we need to work that out we need to work it out in our session meetings we need to do that in our deacons meetings to see God's purpose God's pleasure that the gospel would go forward and the church would grow and of course it takes courage and sacrifice doesn't it to do that it will mean denying ourselves look what Paul says in verse 17 he says even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offerings of your faith it's a complicated idea think of a barbecue bunch of people standing around the barbecue burning some meat that's the main thing you're all there standing gulping at it looking at it wishing you and the tongs there's a cow on there or there's a sheep and then somebody comes along with a crate full of beer that's the barbecue there's meat and there's drinks that's the picture it's a religious picture there's meat there's a cow or a sheep and they've been put on the altar that's the main thing that would be the main sacrifice and then they would pour out wine as a drink offering as part of the sacrificial process and Paul says that's how

I see myself you Philippians you're the main meal you're the main deal you're the main sacrifice I'm just a drink offering puff of smoke and I'm gone I might not even get out of this prison what am I doing in my suffering I'm just a drink offering on top of your sacrifice but if we're going to do the will of God and please God in this city it will involve sacrifice it will involve putting ourselves out to reach the lost thinking of others first before our own comforts and our own prejudices we've always done church this way it didn't used to be like this I'm sure you've heard this before stated now but it's a well known quotation from a communist who is challenging a Christian about his faith back in the old days kind of 70s and when it looked like communism was going to take over the world the communist says this he says the gospel is a much more powerful weapon for the renewal of our society than our

[26 : 31] Marxist philosophy but all the same it is we who will finally be to you we communists do not play with words we are realists and seeing that we are determined to achieve our objective we know how to obtain the means of our salaries and wages we only keep what is strictly necessary we give of our free time and part of our holidays you Christians however give only a little time and hardly any money for the spreading of the gospel of Christ how can anyone believe in the supreme value of the gospel if you don't practice it if you don't spread it if you don't sacrifice time or money for it we believe in our communist message and we are willing to sacrifice everything even our lives but you people are unwilling even to soil your hands now wonderfully history proves him wrong but it still stings a little bit doesn't it be courageous if we are going to be the people that God has called us to be if we are going to live out the gospel at IPC if we're going to please

God and do what pleases him and see his church grow then it will take courage be courageous and then lastly verses 19 to 30 see Christianity is not only taught it's caught and there's great power in an example in a role model Paul has told us we had us shine like stars in the night sky and now he's going to show us he brings before us a couple of stellar Christians if I can put it that way Timothy and Epaphroditus two star examples of what it means to be sold out for Jesus two men who put Jesus first others next themselves last so annoying isn't it Mark Twain said there are a few things harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example and here's Timothy in the congregation or an Epaphroditus it's so annoying you can hear the theory of what I'm saying you can approve it and say well but it can't be done it's often said in churches isn't it some churches motto is it can't be done but when you see it lived out in flesh and blood then you're left with an excuse aren't you and here are two men who are living it out

Timothy he's a rare breed in verse 20 verse 20 I've got no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare for they all seek their own interest but not of Jesus Christ there's very few Timothy's in the church serving the church putting themselves out where did he learn to live like that notice what Paul says in verse 21 he says he's been like a son to me he's been a son working with his father learning the trade copying his dad doing things the same way his dad did and Paul says Timothy he worked with me as a son with a father there's no one like him he shows a genuine concern for your welfare and Epaphroditus he was their pastor in the 17th century there was a famous Christian woman in France called Madame Gaillon and she spent many years in prison because of her convictions and a little French girl volunteered to go to prison with Madame Gaillon to serve her she saw this little girl as her contribution to the cause of the gospel and that's what Epaphroditus did they sent him 1300 km along a very dangerous path en route from Philippi to Rome so that he could share in Paul's imprisonment and it almost cost him his life we read don't we he became very ill and everyone was very concerned about whether he would survive or not Epaphroditus like Jesus I'm sure would rather have stayed at home I'm sure he would have rather have had the comforts of home life but he left home like Jesus did and he came on a very dangerous journey and he laid his life on the line for the sake of the gospel and then there's Paul himself Timothy serving Epaphroditus suffering for the gospel look at Paul verse 19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send

Timothy to you soon so that I may be cheered by news of you I've got no one like him I can think of no one who's as valuable as Timothy is to me I'm going to send him to you he's the key man in this congregation I'm going to send him to you Epaphroditus remember what it said about him it said he almost died for the work of Christ he risked his life to make up for the help that you yourselves couldn't give I'm going to send him back to you in fact I'm eager to send him back to you how many churches are willing to do that that's the motto isn't it lots of churches have reach win build and send win someone for Christ build them up in Christ send them out for Christ but how many churches are willing to send their best people the people that we possibly couldn't do without but that is how churches get started we couldn't possibly lose her we couldn't possibly lose that couple we've got a really good group going and I don't want to see that broken up but if we understand the mind of [32 : 15] Christ and the purpose of Christ he wants to see the gospel go out he wants to see his church built Harry Ironside tells a group of Christians that a church that turned in on themselves they hang a sign up outside the church that said Jesus only and then they forgot about it along came the wind and blew away some of the letters and it eventually began to read us only but they didn't notice what about us in IPC eating what's our church like do we have the mind of Christ are we working out the implications the massive implications of the cross for our lives are we putting Jesus first others next ourselves next or I'll be happy grumbling let's point to to