

**Philippians 2:12-13**  
**We Work Because He Works**  
**Sunday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024**  
**By Ryan Perry**

**Scripture**

**Philippians 2:12-13**

***[12] 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, [13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.***

**Pray**

**Introduction**

As many of you know, this past May, we had the unfortunate experience of having a house fire. We had a portable fire pit in the backyard, that we had been using for about a month and we really thought we had done a good job of continually putting it out when we were done with it.

Well, one night, I put it out and went to bed, only to be woken up by my panicked wife at 3:00 am who told me that our back yard was on fire. I remember the feeling of dread when I got out there and about a third of our back yard was engulfed in flames along with our vinyl fence.

However, the good news in all of this was that I was able to put the fire out, and despite the size of it, the only real thing that we had to either fix or preplace was our fence. **That in and of itself was a huge praise.**

**But I still felt the weight of it all.** For one, our vinyl fence was discontinued so the reality was starting to set in that we may need to replace our fence which could cost us upwards of \$15,000. Likewise, even if we could get someone to somehow repair it, the cost to replace two panels of fence would cost almost \$4000.

And because it was my fault, I wasn't even sure that we could submit it to insurance. **In my mind it was all on me to fix and figure out.**

But my wife assured me, "no, it's not on you to fix it alone. This is definitely something that we need to submit to insurance, and we will be able to find someone to repair the fence." **And of course she was right.** So we submitted it, we got money to fix the fence, and through a friend, we found someone who could repair it.

Now, you may not have a house fire like we did, but I can imagine we have all had times in our lives when we felt like the weight of the world was on our shoulders. **That everything was up to us.**

This can be especially true in our lives with Christ. That all of the work of loving Jesus, following his commands, serving others, and living the Christian life are on our shoulders and is up to us.

**Which can make our life with Christ a joyless duty or it can cause us to give up and stop living the life of faith that God wants for us because it feels too hard.**

But thankfully the apostle Paul has something for us this morning that reminds us that the Christian life isn't a joyless duty and that we don't need to give up because the truth is the weight of our Christian walk isn't upon our shoulders.

Instead, it is meant to be a joyful and awe-filled **life of work** that is **empowered by God** and will result in our **future glory**.

But before we get to the life of work and the empowering of God, the apostle Paul starts by reminding us of our reward, the glory to come.

### **1. Remember, humble obedience leads to future glory (.V 12a)**

**Philippians 2:12a**

***[12a] Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed,***

There is a very important word that Paul uses to open these verses that help us to both understand this section of scripture and give us our motivation for what Paul is about to say.

The word is **“therefore.”**

Any time you see this word in scripture, it should cause you to **stop** because you know that something important is about to be said. Because the word means “in light of,” or “as a result.”

Which means that whatever is about to be said, is the culmination of what came before it.

And Paul, being the chief user of this word, uses it to emphasis really important truths or commands that are based on everything he has just said.

Paul, then, is using the word “therefore” in Philippians 2:12 to point us back primarily to the Christ hymn, and with it, to the commands that he laid out in Philippians 1:27-2:11.

Now, if you were here last week, you will remember that we learned the following things from the Christ hymn in Philippians 2:6-11.

That Jesus chose servanthood over glory. He was in his person and nature fully God, but instead of using his deity for his own advantage he emptied himself. He came to earth to be a servant by being born as a human being.

**He chose servanthood over the glories of heaven.** And he did this to bring glory to the Father and to ransom us from sin and death.

The next thing we learned was that Jesus, in coming to earth as a servant, chose humble obedience.

As a human, which includes all of the frailties and weaknesses that come with it, he chose to be obedient to God the Father. An obedience that ultimately cost him his life on the cross.

Now, most of us wouldn't want to sign up for that kind of life of obedience. Weakness, frailty, and servanthood to the point of death are not at the top of our list of what we want for our life, right?!

But one of the things that Scripture tells us is that Jesus' obedience wasn't out of a sense of duty. Instead, it was from a place of joy and delight. As it says in Hebrews 12:2:

***[2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.***

Jesus chose servanthood, weakness, and death because he knew that it would result in joy. The joy that comes from the Father's glory, the joy that comes from ransoming a people for himself, and the joy that would come as a result of being exalted by the Father.

Which is exactly what happened. Jesus was gloriously resurrected, exalted over all creation, and was shown to be the Lord God, the one to whom all creation will bow and will confess that he is the Lord God Almighty.

And this great picture of Jesus is not only meant to cause us to worship him as God, but it is also meant to be an example for us.

He is an example of how we are to live as humble and obedient servants, which will connect to point two this morning. And he is an example of the hope and glory that awaits us if we believe and live like Christ.

And the reason that Paul is telling us and the Philippians to look back at this is twofold:

First, he is about to call us to an obedience in verse 12 that should be marked by the same attitude that Christ had in his obedience in verse 8.

But secondly, like the humble servanthood and obedience of Christ, our faith and humble obedience come with a promise, **and that promise is the glory to come.**

The outcome of our faith and following in the footsteps of Christ will be the reward of being in the presence of God forever.

Again, this is the same reward and prize that Paul mentions in Philippians 3:14 when he says:

***[14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***

## Application

Now, in the Christian life, and really in life in general, it can be really easy to become people that say: **“We do the things we do because we are supposed to.” Or “We obey God because he tells us to.” Or to your kids “Obey me because I am your parent and I said so.”**

But as true as all of those things may be we forget the fact that purpose, incentives, and rewards are important.

A study by the Incentive Research Foundation found that when businesses use incentive and reward programs, their productivity rates increased by 22%

Harvard Business School (HBS) researchers found that companies whose employees feel a sense of purpose at work and believe their leaders set clear direction and expectation, outperform the stock market by 6.9%.

I bring these up to use real-world examples because I believe that they parallel our experience as Christians.

Yes, we are called to be humble and obedient servants. But the motivation and joy for our faith and obedience is found in the reality that what awaits us is eternal glory, and that our work actually prepares us for that glory.

As we saw last week in Romans 6:5:

***[5] For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.***

**Matthew 23:12**

***[12] Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.***

**2 Corinthians 4:17**

***[17] For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,***

The servanthood and joyful obedience of Christ and the glory he received are what should motivate our faith and obedience. And like Christ, it should produce joy in us because we know that what awaits us is eternal glory with God himself. **It is the prize for which we are running.**

So now that we have been reminded that humble obedience leads to glory, we are ready to turn our attention to the work that Paul is calling us and the Philippians to do. Because we can receive it, not simply as a duty to be done, but as our joy and delight.

## 2. We must work out our salvation (V. 12)

### Philippians 2:12

***[12] 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,***

When we think of the apostle Paul and his writings, it's really easy to see him as the "say it like it is guy." He's not going to mince words and he's not going to beat around the bush. Instead, he's going to throw it out there whether you like it or not.

Though this is true of Paul, I also think we forget that he's positive, compassionate, and encouraging. We see this in verse 12 when he says "My beloved, as you have always obeyed..."

Before he says anything about what they are supposed to do, he sets up this command by reminding them that they are "dear friends" who have actually been pretty good at obeying God's commands.

It's his way of saying, **"Hey Philippians, I love you, you've been doing a good job, keep doing it, keep following Jesus."**

But then he adds something. He says, "so now, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence..." Which gives us a clue about what their obedience has looked like.

The Philippians have been good about following God's commands, particularly when Paul is present. **But he is now urging them to obey even while he is absent.**

Now, to be fair, there are still things that they're doing well in Paul's absence.

They are doing a good job of financially supporting Paul in his gospel ministry. This is why he thanks God for them and remembers their partnership in Philippians 1:4-5.

Secondly, in Philippians 1:7, he says that they are also doing the work of defending and confirming the gospel. **But that doesn't mean that Paul isn't concerned.**

Remember, Epaphroditus has brought a report to Paul to prompted him to write this letter. The Philippian church is dealing with persecution, they are dealing with false teachers (that's chapter 3), and this has led to infighting, division, to some seeking their own selfish gain and empty glory, and as we will see it has led some to walk away from the faith.

So Paul's is being encouraging by commending their obedience, when he was present. But he's also using that encouragement to call them to an even greater focus on obeying God while he is gone.

## Application

Now, if you're a parent you get this right? When you are not with your kids, you leave them with a babysitter, they go to a friend's house, your teen goes to work, or you send them to college, you want your kids to focus on living out the good and right things that you have taught them.

Similarly, this is a reminder to us, as God's people, that he wants us to be faithful to him, and live out his commands no matter where we're at. Whether you are at church or not, around other believers or not, or simply with people or alone. We are called to be faithful to Christ and his commands in all situations.

**There is never a moment in our life where we get a free pass from God. Where he says "live however we want." He is our God and Savior who bought us and redeemed us to be his people and therefore, he wants our hearts, our allegiance, and our obedience at all times.**

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But if Paul is calling us and the Philippians to an at-all-times obedience, what is that look like or how are we supposed to do that?

And in verse 12 Paul answers that question by saying: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

That feels like a hard phrase, doesn't it? When you first read it, you kind of look at it sideways and think, "is Paul saying what I think he's saying? Is he telling us that we need to earn our salvation? Did Paul just go all works righteousness on us?"

**To which I would say no**, because we know that Paul says the exact opposite in other places in the New Testament:

### **Ephesians 2:8-9**

***[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.***

### **Romans 9:10-11**

***[10] And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, [11] though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—***

According to Paul, salvation is fully, from beginning to end, a free gift of God.

So Paul isn't telling us to earn our salvation. However, Paul is being a little more intense in his words than we probably would like him to be.

Because the phrase “work out your salvation” in Philippians 2:12 literally means **“to work fully, to produce, or to accomplish your salvation.”**

But in order to correctly understand this phrase and get at the heart of his command, we need to remember what Paul has previously said in this letter.

In 1:27-28 he tells the Philippians to live as heavenly citizens who make Christ look great, and he calls them to a unity within the church that centers around the gospel.

Then in Philippians 2:1-4 he calls them to pursue unity by turning away from selfish ambition and empty glory and instead to serve one another.

And finally, as we have already recapped, in verses 5-11, they are to have the mindset of Christ and to follow his example of servanthood within the church.

With all of that said, when Paul calls them to “work out their salvation,” here is what he is telling them:

**To live out their faith, or the salvation that they have received, within the community of believers.**

To work for and live out their heavenly citizenship as they pursue unity, as they fight to proclaim the gospel, as they endure persecution, and as they serve one another so that Christ would be seen and believed within their fellowship.

And the reason that he uses such intense wording is because he wants them to take it seriously. **This is especially true since he can’t be with them, and because good works are a confirmation that their faith and salvation are genuine.** As it says in James 2:18:

***[18] But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.***

Which means that when the Philippians do the hard and intense work of loving and serving one another within the community of faith, it is a confirmation of the work that Christ has done in each one of them as believers.

Application

Now in a couple of weeks we will begin a 4-week series on healthy church membership. But one of the primers that I want to give here, for that series, is the reality that scripture makes it clear that nobody gets to come here and be a mere spectator within the body of Christ.

As Peter writes in 1 Peter 4:8-10:

***[8] Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. [9] Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. [10] As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace:***

We are all members of the body of Christ, called to be members of a local church, and God has called each one of us to use our gifts to build one another up.

We are not meant to be spectators or users, but doers of the word. We are to love and serve one another, as heavenly citizens so that Christ would be made to look great.

So consider, even now, how is God calling you to invest in the body of Christ? How does he want you to participate in building up God's people? How might he be moving you from a consumer to a participant at La Crescent Free so that we will become a unified body of Christ?

A body where Christ is seen and experienced, as we serve one another not out of duty, but with fear, reverence, awe, and the joy that God provides.

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Now, as I said, these words can feel weighty and intense. Right or wrong, any time we begin to talk about works in the church, especially in evangelical circles, these defense mechanisms go up, and we try to somehow lessen the commands that God has given us.

This happens because we begin to feel the weight of Paul's words upon our shoulders as if working or living out our salvation within the body of Christ is all up to us.

But Paul doesn't believe that, nor does he want us to live that way. Rather, he wants us to see this intense command to "work out our salvation" through the lens of the gospel.

### **3. We must remember that God works in us (V. 13)**

#### **Philippians 2:13**

***[13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.***

Right away, Paul gives us an amazing reason to worship, to reverence, and to stand in awe of God. The word "for" at the beginning of verse 13 is the Greek word "*Gar*" which is translated "*the reason is...*"

- The reason you can live out your faith within the community of believers.
- The reason you can live as heavenly citizens who make Christ look great.
- The reason that you can pursue unity.
- The reason that you are able to serve one another.
- The reason you can stand firm through persecution.
- The reason you can follow Christ's example and have the hope of glory.
- The reason you should fear, tremble, and stand in awe of God.

...is because God is at work in you. We are not left to live this life of faith on our own.

Because when the God/man, Jesus, died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, he promised us that he wouldn't leave us by ourselves. Rather he tells his disciples and us in Acts 1:8:

***[8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."***

If you are a believer here this morning, I know that you know this, but let it sink in. **You have the power of God living and working within you.**

In fact, the Greek word that Paul uses for "works in you" is *energeo* which means to "empower or put one's capabilities into action."

You are not left to work on your own strength. Rather God is empowering you, by his Spirit, to live out your faith in the world and within the body of Christ.

**It is his work in you that allows you to do the work that he has called you to do.**

But there's more. Because God not only empowers us to work, but Paul says that he also works in us to **will for his good pleasure.**

God is working in us to change our heart attitude. He is the one who changes our perspective so that we see his commands, not as burdensome, but as gladdening and joyful to the soul.

So that when we live out our faith and work to build up the body of Christ, it is our delight to do so.

I realize I often quote these verses, but these words of Jesus in John 15:10-11 make this so clear:

***[10] If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. [11] These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.***

When we follow God's commands and do the work he has for us, he not only empowers it but Jesus tells us that he will give us, by his Spirit, a heart that is full of joy.

And to make sure that we stand in awe of God's goodness to us, Paul says that he does all of this, **for his good pleasure or good purposes.**

God joyfully works in us, as we live out our faith within the community of believers and in the world, so that we would serve him with joy, that we would desire to follow him, and so that his good and perfect will would be accomplished.

Application

Let me ask you, have you heard these phrases? "God helps those who help themselves." Or "Go as far as you can and then leave the rest to God."

I hope you have realized this morning that these kinds of phrases set up a false reality of how God works in us and with us.

That you will leave with the knowledge that you are never, at any moment, left by yourself to live out the Christian life.

And as a body of believers, a community of faith here at LEFC, we are not left to pursue unity or to reflect Christ's greatness on our own.

We serve a God, who, lives within us and is animating or empowering our works, so that they would not be in vain. ***He is producing his fruit in us and through us.***

Which means that we can work out or live out our salvation, with all of our energy and all of our might. Because the results, the fruit, and the eternity-building outcome of those works are in the hands of God.

So I implore you. Work mightily, unto the Lord, with all your energy. Serve one another and work toward unity so that Christ and his greatness would be seen through us.

And do all of it with the joy that Christ has set before us. That as we walk in humble obedience, living out our faith and our salvation, we are assured that God will fully and wholly complete his work in us and through us. As Paul said in Philippians 1:6:

**[6] And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.**

**Let's Pray.**