

God at Work
Philippians 2:12–18
March 31, 2019

Not too long ago, I visited one of our church members in the hospital. As is often the case on these visits, when I walked in sitting beside the hospital bed on the hospital version of a nightstand was an excellent book. That, of course, prompted conversation about this and that author. Eventually, the man asked me, “What’s the most influential book you’ve ever read?”

That’s a tough question. I hadn’t considered it recently, so I stumbled around a bit. Eventually, I think I landed on the right answer. Back in 2005, I believe for my November birthday, my girlfriend’s mother bought me *Future Grace* by John Piper. I’d not read anything by him before. And being somewhat of a different theological persuasion, and a bit hard-headed, I argued with Dr. Piper for at least 200 pages. I still have the aggressively-penciled question marks in my copy 100 feet from this pulpit. But somewhere between page 200 and 300, he—maybe more accurately, his handling of the Scriptures—won me over.

My girlfriend at the time, Julie, probably heard me talk about this guy a lot. So, the next month, when I graduated from college, she bought for a graduation gift, *Don’t Waste Your Life*. Now, in hindsight, I think that’s an interesting—maybe subtle—title of a book to give the man you’re dating. At the time, however, I didn’t think she was implying anything. So, when I finished *Future Grace*, I started that much smaller book.

And one night in early 2006, sitting in my three-bedroom college apartment that I shared with four other guys, I finished one of the chapters. I remember closing the book and just sitting there on my bed. The best writing I’ve ever experienced are those moments when you don’t *want* to put the book down, but you *have* to. You wouldn’t dare turn the page or read another clause until you’ve absorbed what you just read. This book shook me. As a very recent college graduate, the prospect of wasting my life loomed large.

It’s a much longer story, but that book and the sermon it was based off of,¹ set in motion a series of events where I resigned the church I worked at, conned that girl into marrying me,² and we both sailed west to get more education. That brought me to Memphis in the spring of 2007. So, while I’ve read a number of excellent books since, in response to the question as to what book has influenced me the most, 13 years ago I read a book that reshaped the past 12 years of my life.

Piper wrote in one of the early chapters, “You don’t have to know a lot of things for your life to make a lasting difference in the world. But you do have to know the few great things that matter, perhaps just one, and then be willing to live for them and die for them. The people that make a durable difference in the world are not the people who have mastered many things, but who have been mastered by one great thing.”³

This is as Pauline as it comes. The banner over his life was Philippians 1:21, *For to me, to live is Christ.*⁴ That’s the one thing. And what he hoped to teach the Philippians is that their lives ought to reflect that one thing; *their manner of life* ought to *be worthy of the gospel of Christ* (1:27). While we studied that text two weeks ago and it might’ve left our consciousness since then, it’s not left Paul’s. He’s continuing to reiterate that notion, giving both the big picture and the specific details.

¹ A sermon preached in Memphis, by the way, “Boasting Only in the Cross”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XajXpH908Yg>

² In true cage-stage Piper-ite fashion, I got down on one knee, looked deep into her blue eyes, and said, “Julie, . . . don’t waste your life.” :)

³ John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, 44-45.

⁴ The chapter after the above quote is centered on Philippians 1:21, in fact.

Note first,

1. God works in and through the Philippians

Verse 12: *Therefore, my beloved . . .*

Last week, we considered together what some call the Mount Everest of New Testament Christology. In that passage, Paul taught the Philippians that one way they might embody lives worthy of the gospel of Christ was by their single-mindedness. They'd participated in the same Spirit; therefore, they were to be of one mind (Phil 2:2). Chapter two's emphasis on unity picked up on chapter 1:27's *standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel*.

But this unity created by God doesn't maintain itself in the life of the church, regardless of our disposition toward one another. Paul writes, 2:3, *in humility count others more significant than yourselves*. Humility is prerequisite to ongoing unity. In His death and resurrection, Christ creates unity. In His life, He modeled that which helps to maintain it. Since that's true, Paul takes us from base camp to the Christological peak in verses 6–11, *who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross* (2:6–8).

I preached that last Sunday. Then on Monday I read George Herbert's "The Sacrifice," written from the perspective of the One who humbled Himself: "Oh all ye, who pass by, whose eyes and mind to worldly things are sharp, but to me blind; to *me*, who took eyes that I might you find: Was ever grief like mine?"⁵ He humbled Himself, enduring the most shameful of deaths, taking eyes that He might us find.

Though He humbled Himself, God exalted Him, giving Him the name above every name. And through the risen, ascended, exalted One, He saves a people for Himself. The humility required in verses 1–4 of chapter two God provides in Christ. Therefore, we have verse 5: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus*.

That section should *never* be forgotten, of course, but it certainly should be kept in mind when considering our passage today. Who Christ is and what He has done leads to verse 12: *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*.

The *therefore* means that Paul continues writing with the Christ-hymn in mind. Further, He continues writing with affection, *my beloved*. It's difficult when we take a section a week to keep in mind the context of the entire letter. So, while it's been four weeks since I preached on this, it's been less than four minutes since Paul wrote, *For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus* (Phil. 1:8). Though Paul might occasionally exhort them in this letter, we should not let that dissuade us from recalling his Christ-begotten affection for this congregation. He thanks His God upon His every remembrance of them (Phil. 1:3).

As the Father who loves his child, Paul's affection leads to gentle admonition, v. 12, *as you have always obeyed*. To obey here means they not only heard the commands of the Lord, but submitted themselves to what they heard.⁶ They'd done this repeatedly.⁷ The Philippians had a track record of

⁵ Jim Scott Orrick, *A Year with George Herbert*, 6.

⁶ See the etymology of *υποκινουσατε*. *υπο* means "under," or to subject oneself. *ακουω* means to hear. Therefore, *υπο ακουω* equals *υποκινουσατε*, meaning both to hear *and* to submit to that which you hear. See Joseph Hellerman, *Philippians*, EGGNT, 128.

⁷ Constatative aorist, meaning ongoing or repeated action. See Hellerman, 128.

faithful obedience. Though the commands came through Paul, ultimately, they'd been faithful to hear and obey God Himself.⁸

Paul reminds the Philippians of his love for them, points to their faithful past, and encourages more of the same in the present. Verse 12 continues, *as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence*. We saw back in chapter 1 that Paul anticipated coming to the Philippians again (1:26). Right now, however, he remained in prison.

While Paul was imprisoned, the Philippian church sent Epaphroditus to Paul with a financial gift. When Epaphroditus showed up, what do you think he and Paul talked about? I'd imagine eventually E would've said, "You know, Paul, some, I'm not saying *all*, but some of the church members started acting a bit different right after you left." Paul's hinted at this already in chapter 1:27, *so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit*.

Like us, the Philippians appeared to shape up based on who's around or soon to be around. In my mid-30's, I still might weed-eat in a thunderstorm if dad's coming in town. About a month ago, many of the ladies in our fellowship went away for a Friday night retreat. I won't speak for all the husbands, but you wouldn't believe how productive the kids and I were from 11-noon that Saturday. The church parking lot, so I've heard hypothetically, has the quasi-miraculous capability to turn that frown. Transformative church asphalt, so they say. I secretly relish meeting new people at a ball game or wherever, talking to them for an hour or so, and then seeing their face after they ask what I do for a living. I can't tell you how many times I've seen it wash over them, "Oh no, how many dozen of those words have I said?"

Paul says, *as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation*. Whether Paul comes or does not, they were to work out their salvation. It's key to note that Paul doesn't say *work for* your salvation, or *work at* your salvation. This is part of the therefore of verse 12, tethering this passage to the truths of verses 1-11. What Christ has done for them, and in them, they were to work out.

The question many have discussed is whether this refers to the individual's salvation or whether the context continues to address the effect of salvation on the Philippians' relationships within the church, as we saw last week concerning unity and humility.

To begin unraveling this question, the term for salvation refers most often to individual, eschatological—meaning in the future—deliverance.⁹ God will ultimately deliver and save individual people. And that future and glorious truth ought to be applied in the present day. Work out your salvation. That's what the term for salvation means.

The verbs and pronouns, however, are in the plural, both "work out" and "your own" We emphasize this often, but it should be understood to be *as you all have always obeyed, . . . you all work out your all's own salvation*. Further, the context on both sides of the command appears to point toward corporate application. We saw this in last week's text concerning unity and humility. We'll see it today concerning grumbling and disputing.

So, what should we conclude? Both/and is better than either/or.¹⁰ For far too long, we've thought that salvation only had to do with "me."¹¹ While salvation is *not less* than personal salvation, it is more. Salvation is a community creating event. God gifts us this community of believers so that we might work out our salvation together. One commentator writes, "Paul's challenge, then, relates

⁸ Gordon Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 223.

⁹ Σωτηριαν. See Moises Silva, *Philippians*, 119-20; Peter O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, NIGTC, 278; Hellerman, 131.

¹⁰ Hellerman writes, "Both interpretations have much in their favor, and a general consensus . . . has led recent commentators to avoid a strict dichotomy between the two views," 131.

¹¹ Our evangelistic methodologies often betray this notion.

to the *present* outworking of their eschatological salvation within the believing community in Philippi.”¹² It’s both/and.

I’ve told this story before to multiple people here, but I don’t ever think from the pulpit. However, it’s about as perfect an illustration of not separating those two truths that I’ve ever experienced. A little over 3 years ago, I went to pray with Ms. Pernie Hester, beloved—to put it mildly—long-time member of South Woods. She was having surgery that day. Only a few moments before they took her back, I read from 1 Peter 1. When I finished reading, she—as was typical—had a comment on the text that reflected years and years of faithful meditation. She said this about *though you have not seen Him, you love Him*, “You know, Matt. I can’t put my arms around Jesus. So, the best way I know to show my love for Him is to love His people.” In her final words to me, she gave the best description of her life I’d ever heard.¹³ Because if you knew her, you were convinced she loved the One she couldn’t see by how she loved His people.¹⁴

Working out your salvation has to do with Christ. Yes, of course. But it also has to do with how we apply that which Christ worked in us in how we relate to other people, both within the church and outside it.¹⁵ We’re to work out what God’s worked in. And this is a continual reality. How might I apply today what God’s done in me in this scenario?

We’re to do this regularly. And we’re to do this, Paul writes, *with fear and trembling*. This is an echo of an oft-quoted Old Testament coupling.¹⁶ The one that might be most familiar to us comes from Psalm 2:11, *Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling*. In that Psalm’s context, if there’s no border to this King’s reign, and there’s no limit to his power, then we ought to fear him. If we see this rightly, the corresponding reaction is not flippant. We just read in Philippians 2:10–11 that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess the Lordship—the rule—of this King. Therefore, we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, meaning with reverence and awe.¹⁷

To further make that point, we do this with awe because of Who actually does the work in us. Fear and trembling is the appropriate response.¹⁸ Verse 13, *For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*. The Apostle Paul wasn’t a deist, assuming the Lord’s transcendence but not His nearness. God’s eyes are watching, His hand is working, to accomplish all His purposes for the good of His people.¹⁹

The ground, or foundation, of the Philippians’ working out their salvation was in the fact that God worked in them. The Philippians aren’t working alone or even in their own strength. As another man wrote, “God does not work because man works. Rather, man can and must work because God has worked and is working.”²⁰ God works it in; they work it out.

Again, I use the words “they,” “us,” “their,” “them,” because this verse uses plural pronouns. Verse 13: *For it is God who works in you all*. The tense of the verb teaches that this is something God does continually.²¹ He’s persistently working in us to bring about His purposes.

¹² Hellerman, 131.

¹³ I told her as much.

¹⁴ Ms. Pernie could wax eloquent on the gospel and the church more clearly, and with more credibility, than many PhDs in ecclesiology.

¹⁵ O’Brien makes the evangelistic hint on p. 280. And this isn’t a negation of Solus Christus, that is, salvation is in Christ alone, any more than “make your calling and election sure” suggests that election is not of God Himself. Peter O’Brien makes this point, 279.

¹⁶ Used 13x in the Septuagint according to Hellerman, 130.

¹⁷ BDAG 1062c.

¹⁸ O’Brien, 284.

¹⁹ Children Desiring God definition of providence.

²⁰ Hellerman, 132.

²¹ O’Brien, 238; Hellerman, 133.

Now the question many want to wrestle with is whether *we* work or God *does*. They want to choose between verse 12 and 13. Which one is it?

Let me try my hand at a quasi-absurd illustration.²² When we lived in Middle East Tennessee, surrounded by mountains and lakes, I used to try my legs at water skiing from time to time. Now, especially the first time, I learned that this is not the simplest of recreations. You put these heavy fiberglass 2X4's on your feet and then awkwardly swim out a decent distance from the boat. But once you're out far enough, there are a few things *you must do* if you'd like to ski. You have to sit back. You keep your knees bent. You lock your arms. You hold the rope.²³

Those are the things *you must do* if you'd like to ski. If you don't lock your arms and bend your knees, you'll do a good bit of flying across the water, but there will be no skiing.

On the other hand, imagine if I took the ol' Honda Accord down to Center Hill Lake, opened the trunk, grabbed my rope and water-skis, swam out a decent distance from the bank, and then proceeded to lean back, lock my arms, bend my knees, hold the rope, and await the moment when I'd take off from wake to wake, gliding across the surface of the water.

There are things I must do, yes; but the power and the energy that I need to ski is not in me, nor in any posture I assume. If I don't do certain things, I won't ski; but at no point am I making it happen.

We work. But God is the One working in us.

What does God work in us? Verse 13 continues, *to will and to work for his good pleasure*. This refers to the Philippians' will, denoting a resolve or purposeful determination.²⁴ God's working doesn't take their will from them; instead God redirects and empowers it. And the text says that He directs that will toward His good pleasure.

God worked in the church at Philippi; they were to work out what He worked in. All of this is for His pleasure in His people.

Maybe that takes your mind to Luke 3 and Jesus' baptism where the Father says to the Son, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased" (Lk. 3:22). I hope that's in your mind, in fact. Because God's making us like His Son, the One He's pleased with. God's not frowning upon you, dear saint. He sees His Son's life in your account; and He's working to make that a more and more present reality. *He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion* (Phil. 1:6).

God's working in us *and* His pleasure in us are not disconnected.

Why would they wait to work out their salvation until Paul showed up? The Lord Himself was present, working in and through them, for His pleasure.

Note secondly,

2. God works in and through the Philippians for the good of the world.

Now, here's another reason *work out your salvation* should be interpreted to include corporate realities. Last week's text on unity and humility is on one side of verses 12–13; on the other side is verse 14: *Do all things without grumbling or disputing*.

We just had a team return from Central Asia, passing out the Scriptures among the unreached. The first time I went over there, about ten years ago, I attended a house church gathering led by Zane Pratt. Zane was teaching this Philippians passage that morning. And he began

²² After the service, you can tell me something that's helped you think through this text.

²³ You might say a prayer.

²⁴ O'Brien, 287.

by saying this, “It’s not the unclear passages that cause me the most issue. It’s the ones that are clear.” He was referring to verse 14: *Do all things without grumbling or disputing.*²⁵

There’s just not enough ambiguity in that verse is there? Sometimes I’ve wanted to grumble about the clarity of Philippians 2:14. Come on, Matt, why don’t you work a little harder and find us all a loophole in the Greek? Trust me, if there were one, I would’ve found it.

There’s a honeymoon period to all relationships. We often refer to this only in marriage, but it’s in all friendships. Of course, this is sometimes why marriages fall apart after a few years. But this is also why many teenagers have a new BFF every other calendar year. The glitz of a new friend doesn’t yet know the imperfections of this or that person. This is also why many pastors typically stay at their church for 3 years or less. Because somewhere down the road, you’re going to be sinned against. You will find things about this or that person to complain about. In any real substantial relationship, you’ll eventually discover something to dispute over.

The Philippian church was now about 10 years old. The quirks were no longer cute. The character flaws were in concrete, it seemed. They complained to each other about each other. They disputed with one another about one another. This isn’t just why pastors leave churches, this is often—not *always*—why church members hop from one place to another. The newness has worn off. He or she isn’t as flawless as I thought he or she was. This gal seems nice.

And this is not disconnected from the pride of last week. I think you can fairly easily see how pride can lead to or exacerbate disputing. Information, we must assert, not only can make someone wiser; more information, especially information that’s skewed or incorrect, can also make someone more foolish.²⁶ With the quick and easy accessibility of all kinds of information, we’re seeing the latter in our day in seemingly unprecedented ways.

One man wrote, “Pride doesn’t listen. It knows.”²⁷ We noted this in the Gospel of Luke, when the Writer and Fulfillment of the Law sat at dinner with the Pharisees; and those guys thought their interpretation of the law had to be better than His (Lk. 14:1–11). And if mankind can be prideful toward Jesus Himself, then of course they can be prideful toward one another, bent on disagreement, unwilling to listen to the other.²⁸ I found helpful an excerpt from Trevin Wax this week. He wrote this, “Worldliness is often manifested not merely in the positions we might take, but whenever we engage in debate *the same way unbelievers do.*”²⁹

Example is effective. And this merciless disputing can even sneak into the church. We disagree on this or that implication of this or that passage, this or that methodology, this or that approach, and we take aim.

This kind of church conflict can be seemingly less theological in nature, but no less connected to pride, as we grumble. You say, “What’s the connection between pride and complaining?” Let me point back to that book I mentioned earlier by Piper entitled *Future Grace*. In line with Philippians 2, Piper defines pride in part as, “a turning away from God specifically to take satisfaction in *self.*”³⁰ One way this satisfaction in self manifests itself, he argues, is in self-pity. Pride wants what it wants. And when it doesn’t get what it wants, complaint follows. Pride is about self. So is much of murmuring.

²⁵ One time this was on our fridge as a monthly memory verse and one of my more insightful friends commented, “I wonder how many parents are trying to get their kids to memorize that one.”

²⁶ See Alan Jacobs, *How to Think*, 89, for more on this.

²⁷ Kevin Vanhoozer, quoted by Matt Smethurst:
<https://twitter.com/MattSmethurst/status/10910116248052531201/31/19>.

²⁸ “The repugnant cultural other,” again, from Alan Jacobs book, *How to Think*.

²⁹ Trevin Wax, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/gospel-justice-spectrum-not-two-sides/>

³⁰ John Piper, *Future Grace*, 87.

Though the Philippian church partnered with Paul in ways that ought to be applauded, their selfish ambition and pride crept into the life of the church and manifested itself in both of these ways: grumbling and disputing.³¹

Those aren't private sins. In fact, both are contagious. We grumble about one another, in front of one another. We dispute with one another, in front of one another, maybe even sometimes with the person we're disputing with present. Very rarely does merely one individual grumble and another person not follow suit. And this contagion disrupts the unity of the church. Paul teaches the Philippians to work out their salvation in these specific ways, by not grumbling or disputing.

Why should they do this? It actually had consequence for their corporate witness to the world as well. Verse 15, *that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish*. Paul's concerned about their resemblance to their Father, who is Himself perfect, blameless, and without blemish.

Where would they do this? Verse 15, *that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation*. Paul says, "Everyone else looks different." The world you live in is crooked, a word used to describe roads, rivers, and snakes.³² The generation alive in Paul's day was described as twisted or perverse. Often, we only think of particular sins as perverse; but the context of this letter most likely means that Paul has in mind the twisted nature of the world's pride, dissension, murmuring, and selfish ambition. While in our day, those might be lower-case sins, the letter to the Philippians highlights them. And if this community of Christ-followers demonstrated humility, were committed to considering others above oneself, and were marked by an absence of grumbling and disputing, they'd certainly stand out.

Which is precisely what Paul writes, v. 15, *children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world*. Now, to grasp the image Paul uses here, we'd have to get out of the city. Whenever I go see my parents, or my wife's, on their farms in rural Tennessee, one of my favorite things is getting reacquainted with the stars. A couple times in my life I've been to places miles and miles from any artificial form of light. When you're in those places, the stars shine all the brighter.

They didn't have LEDs in ancient Greece. Against the backdrop of a crooked and twisted generation, a community of Christ-united, self-denying, others-oriented, and humble people would shine as lights in the world. Like their Old Testament forbearers, the New Testament church is a light to the nations. Their community was to be one of contrast.³³ Their relationship to God and to one another had significance for their mission to the world.³⁴

This is what they were to work out. And *why* they were to work it out.

And why would they shine, in particular? Because they were, v. 16, *holding fast to the word of life*. The word of life is the gospel itself.³⁵ This word of life actually *created* life in these Philippians. And now, in the face of opposition (1:27–30), they were to hold fast to it.

³¹ O'Brien, 291. "Interpersonal disputes," Hellerman, 134.

³² Hellerman, 136.

³³ See Michael Goheen, *A Light to the Nations* for an insightful study of this thread throughout all the Scriptures.

³⁴ At Southeastern, I essentially wrote on this topic. My thesis was this: "The health of the local church's inner life shapes the corporate aspect of the mission of the church because united and holy congregations accurately display the gospel to the world." If you're into rare books, there are three copies in the world. Or if Ambien is getting expensive, I can email you a copy.

³⁵ O'Brien, 298.

This is one of the clearest evangelistic verses in all the New Testament.³⁶ Within the notion “holding fast” is also the notion of “holding forth.”³⁷ It doesn’t necessarily mean one or the other; because in this context, to hold fast to the gospel also would mean to hold it forth.

They were doing this. They were shining as lights in the world. God works in and through the Philippians; and He does so for the good of the world.

Note third,

3. God’s working in and through the Philippians for the good of the world is Paul’s joy.

Paul then brings his labors into it, at the end of verse 16, *so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain.*

Paul has a forward-looking orientation to everything he does, including in the book of Philippians. He’s not anti-*future grace*. In chapter 1 he prays that the Philippians might be *pure and blameless for the day of Christ* (1:10). A few verses later, he writes, *My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better* (1:23). He’s back at it here, looking forward to *that day*, and asking, “Is what I do today significant in light of *that day*?”³⁸

He’s imploring the Philippians to work out their salvation, in and among one another, for the good of the world, v. 16, *so that . . . he may be proud that he did not run or labor in vain.*

There’s a major difference between a race with your kid to the car, a race to the Commissary after a benediction, and the race Paul refers to here. As you know, Paul regularly referred to the imagery of a race in the athletic arena. While you don’t have to train to race to the car with your kids, the race Paul refers to is one preceded by months and months—maybe years—of tireless labor. When the athlete didn’t feel like it, he or she ran. Rather than sleep, he or she ran. It affected how the athlete ate, how he or she spent their time, and the amount of leisure he or she had. To work for something like that is also to hope that the labor will *not* be in vain.

And many times, it isn’t; the payoff is *absolutely worth the work*. At the finish line, if you had the energy, you might head back to the starting gate. Whether it’s the labor of painting a wall, training for some athletic event, reading a challenging book, earning a degree, or practicing your scales, at the end of the labor, you either look back and say, “Every second I spent laboring on that project was worth it. I’d do it again,” or you say “Why’d I waste my time?”

Paul had worked too, laboring and sacrificing years of his life for the spread of the gospel throughout the nations. As he looks forward to the day of Christ, he considers his past and present labor among the Philippians and encourages them toward more faithfulness *so that*, in *that day*, they might be his boast.

If verse 16’s hypothetical question is, “Is it worth it?” then Paul answers himself in verse 17, *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.* He’s immediately beyond thinking on his labors. Peter O’Brien writes, “But why talk of labors? I am ready even if the worst comes.”³⁹ Even if he were to be martyred, he is glad and rejoices in it.

And the offering of his life for the sake of the gospel would be a modest sacrifice in comparison to the Philippians’ offering.⁴⁰ That’s what he means by a drink offering upon the

³⁶ See Robert Plummer, “The Church’s Missionary Nature: The Apostle Paul and His Churches” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001).

³⁷ See Peter O’Brien, *Gospel and Mission in Paul*, 119.

³⁸ Dr. Stan May’s question.

³⁹ O’Brien, 303.

⁴⁰ O’Brien, 310

sacrificial offering of their faith. On that day, he would not have run in vain. They would indeed be his boast.

He rejoices in God's work in them, verse 17 makes clear. And, in the midst of opposition and impending suffering, verse 18 implores the Philippians to join him in that joy, v. 18, *Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me*. Look at verses 17 and 18. Glad. Rejoice. Glad. Rejoice. One man writes, "Nowhere else in his letters does Paul so pointedly emphasize joy in the midst of suffering for the gospel."⁴¹

God had worked in and through Paul for the good of the Philippians. And He would work in and through the Philippians for the good of the world. This brought Paul joy. This is what he lived for. And he told the Philippians they ought to rejoice in, and live for, this as well.

Conclusion

I wonder if you have something better to live for? It's not just 23-year-old men in crowded apartments that wonder whether they are wasting their life.

Have you a better plan for your 75 or so years? This doesn't mean you need to move or go to seminary. But it definitely will affect how you work, how you treat your neighbors, how you interact with your family, and how much you enter-in to life with other Christians in the local church. As Sinclair Ferguson states so pointedly, "If Christ would indwell them, what can I do but embrace them."⁴²

Let's spend our lives for this: God in Christ changing us, working in and through us in the lives of others, for the good of the world.

⁴¹ Hellerman, 143.

⁴² Lecture on "Union with Christ" at Bethlehem Baptist: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riAP6Jsvy1A>