

HOW THE WORK OF BEING SAVED WORKS (Philippians 2:12-18)

It appears to me that most Americans have, what I would call, a love/hate relationship with work. For some people, work is a four-letter word. Other people, instead of working to live, they live to work.

It occurs to me that some of the best-known country songs of all time have been about work. Johnny Cash, John Denver, and others all recorded the American folk-song, "I've Been Working on the Railroad." And how long have they been working on the railroad? "All the live-long day."

This next song has been covered by many artists, but it was Tennessee Ernie Ford's version that took the music world by storm. It was a crossover hit that reached number one on both the country and the pop charts. It was his 1955 version of *Sixteen Tons*. Many of you are familiar with the chorus:

You load 16 tons, what do you get?
Another day older and deeper in debt
St. Peter don't you call me, 'cause I can't go
I owe my soul to the company store.

There have been so many other country and western songs about work. There was *The Factory* by Kenny Rogers, *Coal Miner's Daughter* by Loretta Lynn, *9 to 5* by Dolly Parton, and there have been so many others.

We sing about work. We talk about work. We add words to further define our work: homework, housework, yardwork, paperwork.

Work is so central to our existence that we shouldn't be surprised that the Bible has much to say about work. After creating man, what did God do? He gave him a job, and the job included room and board. Adam was to live in the garden, to work it, to tend it, and he was to eat of the food which the garden provided.

It is worth noting that work came about before the fall, not after it. It was after the fall that work became a struggle, that it became laborious. That fact leads me to believe that in heaven we will have work to do, but it will be work that is fulfilling, not draining, work that uplifts, not work that drags us down.

The Bible uses the word *work* as both a noun and a verb. In today's passage, that word shows up three times, and each time it is a verb. In the first occurrence, it tells us what we are to do, and in the second, what God does. Let's read our passage, Philippians 2:12-18.

I have entitled today's message, "How the Work of Being Saved Works." That title needs some explanation. It is drawn from v. 12 where Paul tells the believers in Philippi to work out their salvation. Notice what Paul did not write. He did not write they were **to work for** their salvation, **or to work on** their salvation, or **to work towards** their salvation. **They were to work it out.** We'll talk about what that means later, but the point I want to make is that they already had a saving relationship with Jesus. It is important to

remember that this was not written to lost people who needed to be saved. Rather, it was written to saved people who were being called upon to live in a way that was consistent with who they now were.

I also want you to keep in mind that **there is a difference between getting saved and being saved**. Getting saved happens at a point in time while being saved happens over a long period of time.

Let me rehearse something we have gone over before. It has to do with the fact that salvation should be thought of as a past event, a present process, and a future certainty, and those three phases correspond to three important, doctrinal words—justification, sanctification, and glorification.

Justification took place at a point in time. You were saved when you trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If you are a Christian, you should be able to point to a SPOT, a specific place or time when you trusted Jesus. My SPOT was in the office of my pastor. It was on a Sunday afternoon when I was 8-years old. He walked me down the Roman Road, i.e., he showed me several passages in the Book of Romans. I knelt on the floor in his office and asked Jesus to become my Savior and Lord. Where is your SPOT? Where and when did you trust Jesus.

Sanctification, however, is a process of becoming more and more like Jesus. It starts when you trust Jesus and continues for the rest of your life. You were saved when you were justified. You are being saved as you are being sanctified.

The third aspect of salvation is glorification. That takes place when Jesus comes back. At the moment He returns, you will be given a resurrection body. That is when your salvation will be full and final. Like justification, glorification will take place at a point in time. At the point, you will be completely saved. The wonderful news is that once God starts the work of salvation in your life, He will complete it (1:6).

When we read the word *saved* in the N.T., we have to ask, “With which aspect of salvation is this passage dealing? Is it justification, sanctification, or glorification?”

In the passage before us, Philippians 2. Paul is dealing with sanctification. He is not talking about getting saved. His concern here is being saved and living as a saved person. I am going to divide this passage into three different works that are involved in the wider work of being saved.

The Work of Being Saved Involves In-Work—That’s What God Does

Look at v. 13. This verse should be of great comfort to the believer. God has not left you on your own to figure things out for yourself. He is at work in you.

How does God work in us? He works in us by means of His Holy Spirit whom He has placed in us. Every believer has the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit of God. We are told in Romans 8:9 that if anyone does not have the Spirit of God, that person does not belong to God. The Holy Spirit is essential for our growth or our sanctification. The process of being saved cannot happen apart from the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He is necessary.

Just who is the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that God exists in three Persons—God

the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We do not serve three Gods. There is one God, but He exists as three Persons who are perfectly united as one.

Listen to what Jesus said to His disciples about the Holy Spirit. On the very night that Jesus was arrested, the night before His death on the cross, Jesus said, “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth . . . You know Him, for He dwells in you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17).

Jesus refers to Him as the *Helper*. Other versions use such words as the *Counselor*, *Advocate*, and *Comforter*. The word literally means, “One called alongside.” It was a military word. When soldiers went into battle, they fought in pairs. They stood back-to-back so that each one could cover the other’s blind side.

Jesus is telling His disciples, “I’m not sending you into battle alone. My Spirit will be with you every step.”

God works in us by His Spirit, **but what does God work in us?** According to our text, God does two things in us. He works in us *to will* and *to work* for His good pleasure. Other versions use the phrase “to will and to do.” For us to do something, we must first will it. There has to be a *want to* or a motivation. One of the inward works of the Holy Spirit is to give us a desire to serve the Lord in a certain way or to please Him by doing a certain thing.

What is a spiritual discipline or activity that you know you should do, but you can’t get excited about doing it? Would it be reading your Bible, spending time in prayer, telling others about the Lord? There may be various reasons why we lack an appetite for the things of God. Have you ever noticed that when you are sick you commonly lack an appetite for food?

I remember one time, a number of years ago, that I got food poisoning. I was sick, really sick. To make matters worse, I got sick the night before Thanksgiving. The day of Thanksgiving, I had no appetite at all. There was all that turkey and dressing, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes with marshmallows and brown sugar, and several different pies, among a host of other dishes, and I couldn’t eat a thing. It was the worst Thanksgiving of my life. We lack an appetite when we are sick.

Likewise, some people lack an appetite for the things of God because they are spiritually sick. Maybe there is sin in their life, and that sin dampens an appetite for God, His word, prayer, and fellowship with other believers.

Maybe they have gorged themselves on the things of the world leaving no room for the things of God.

If you lack an appetite for God, confession might be the first thing you need to do. Secondly, ask the Holy Spirit to work within you a will for the things that God desires for you. I believe that is prayer God will surely answer.

Once God works within you to will what He wants, He will help you to do what He wants. He will give you direction. He will give you strength. He will give you whatever help you need to accomplish what God desires.

Hugo is a 2011 film set in Paris of the 1930’s. It is about a 12-year-old orphan who keeps the large, train station clocks in Paris working. In one scene, Hugo is talking to Isabelle, another orphan of about the same age. They are up in the clock tower

surrounded by the massive and intricate workings of the train station clock. Hugo says to Isabelle:

Everything has a purpose, even machines. Clocks tell the time. Trains take you to places. They do what they're meant to do . . . Maybe that's why broken machines make me so sad. They can't do what they're meant to do. Maybe it's the same with people. If you lose your purpose, it's like you're broken.

Isabelle: Is that *your* purpose, fixing things?

Hugo: I don't know. It's what my father did.

Isabelle: I wonder what my purpose is.

Hugo: I don't know.

Isabelle: Maybe if I'd known my parents . . . I would know [my purpose].

Together, Hugo and Isabelle walk to the inside face of the giant clock. Below them is a stunning, breathtaking view of Paris lit up at night, with the Eiffel Tower in the distance.

Hugo continues:

Right after my father died, I would come up here a lot. I'd imagine the whole world was one big machine. Machines never come with any extra parts, you know. They always come with the exact amount they need. So, I figured, if the entire world was one big machine . . . I couldn't be an extra part. I had to be here for some reason. And that means you have to be here for some reason, too.

The scene ends with an overhead shot of two giant, interlocking, turning wheels and Hugo and Isabelle surveying the spectacular view of Paris.

Likewise, you are not just an extra part. You are here for a reason. Do you know your reason? The Holy Spirit is working in you to help you know your reason and to help you fulfill the role God has for you. That is His work in you.

The Work of Being Saved Involves Out-Work—That's What We Do

Look back at v. 12. We are to work out or live out what God is working in us, whatever that might be. Notice that v. 12 begins with the word *therefore*.

My pastor growing up used to say, "Whenever you come to a *therefore* in Scripture, you need to stop and consider what it is there for."

In order to understand the Bible, you must remember that context is King. Earlier in the chapter, Paul encouraged the believers in Philippi to be others-oriented. They were to live selflessly rather than selfishly. He then points to Jesus, showing how He lived humbly and obediently. We are to do for others what He did for us. God rewarded His obedience.

Paul then remembers that when he was with those believers in Philippi that they listened to Him. They did what He said. Even though he is no longer with them, he wants

them to still listen to him and do what he says. He then calls them to a sacred work. I use the term *sacred work* because Paul says that what they are to do, they are to do *with fear and trembling*. This is serious and holy stuff.

One person critiqued our culture saying that we worship our work; we work at our play, and we play at our worship.

God called the believers in Philippi to a holy work. They were to worship God by doing this work, and for that reason, they were not to play at it. To what work did Paul call them? They were to live out what they were becoming. God was changing them on the inside. They were to make it known on the outside. People needed to see they had been made new by their relationship with Jesus.

The same is true for us. People need to see that Christ has made a radical difference in our lives. Paul offers some ideas of what working out our salvation looks like (vv. 14-16).

Look at v. 14. Here are two things we are to avoid. We are to avoid getting caught up in both grumbling and disputing. Grumbling is what we do all on our own while disputing necessarily involves others.

Grumbling is basically mumbling with a bad attitude. Under our breath, in a low voice, we complain about the circumstances, the decisions others have made, the way things are going, and how things would be better around here if we were the ones making the decisions.

Some people act as though grumbling was their spiritual gift, and they want to make ample use of their gift. I would advise that you keep that gift to yourself because God takes a dim view of grumbling. It dishonors Him. It dispirits those He has called to lead. We are to build people up, not tear them down.

Grumbling is a sin. We are to avoid it.

In the movie *Bambi*, Thumper's mom asked him sternly, "What did your Father say to you this morning?" He answered, "If you don't have something nice to say, don't say nuthin' at all." Those are words to live by.

We are to avoid grumbling and disputing. That is arguing, having contentious conversations. If we can at all help it, we are not to be disagreeable. We need to fight for the truth, but we don't have to fight for our way.

At this point, Romans 12:18 should be our guide, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceable with all."

While v. 14 tells us what to avoid, v. 15 tells us what we are to become. We are to be blameless and innocent children of God. That means that no one should be able to bring a charge of wrongdoing against you. To do so, they would have to fabricate something. They would have to resort to bringing a false charge against you.

That is what happened with Jesus. He was innocent. He was the spotless lamb. Jesus' arrest was orchestrated by the ruling Jewish officials. They knew the verdict would be guilty. They knew the punishment would be death. The only thing they didn't know at the time of His arrest was what the charge would be. They had to make something up.

Don't give people ammunition they can use against you. If they are going to bring you down, make them work at it.

We are to be noticeably different than the world around us. The darker the night, the brighter the light. We are to shine as bright lights in our dark world.

As we work out our salvation, there are some things we are to avoid, some things we are to become, and v. 16 tells us of something we are to hold on to. We are to hold fast to the word of life.

What did Paul mean by the phrase, *the word of life*? I don't think he meant the Bible because no one in Philippi owned a Bible. What they did have was the life-giving message of the gospel that Paul had preached to them. They were to hold firmly to that gospel message and not let go. That gospel message is a life-giving and a life-changing message. It changes us from the inside out.

Have you ever thought about the difference between the superhero Batman and the superhero Spiderman? Both were crime fighters, but there is one major difference between the two. Batman possessed no special powers. He was just a rich dude with a lot of fancy gadgets. Spiderman, however, had been changed from the inside out. He'd been bitten by an artificially enhanced spider, and that spider venom changed his DNA.

We, too, have been changed from the inside out. Now, it is time to show on the outside the change that has taken place on the inside. We are to work out what God has worked in us.

We have looked at the in-work and the out-work. There is one more type of work to consider.

The Work of Being Saved Involves Co-Work—That's the Help of Others

Paul refers to himself in the latter part of v. 16 as well as vv. 17-18. While today's text ends with v. 18, in the verses that follow, Paul tells the believers in Philippi that he is going to send Timothy to them, and he is going to send Epaphroditus back to them. Look at vv. 19, 25. Paul viewed Timothy and Epaphroditus as co-workers with him just as Paul was a co-worker with the Church in Philippi. They helped one another.

Living the Christian life is not an individual sport; it's a team sport. We need one another.

I have found a disturbing trend in our culture as it relates to living the Christian life. I don't know what to call it. For lack of a better term, I am calling it the privatization of the Christian life. By that, I mean that many Christians have concluded that they don't really need a local church. They can access sermons and Christian teaching from the Internet. They can listen to worship music on their own. They have concluded that they don't need to belong to a Church family. They may have a few Christian friends they can spend time with, but they don't need or really want to commit themselves to an actual church.

They have made themselves into consumers of religious products. That is not N.T. Christianity. That may be a 21st Century version of Christianity, but it falls short, far short of what Jesus and the N.T. teaches.

The Christian life is meant to be lived in community. It is in the Christian community, the church, that you give of yourself, that you serve with the spiritual gifts God has given you.

It seems that people today want to have a no-strings attached association with a church. They don't want any expectations laid on them. They don't want to have any responsibilities. They want to have the complete freedom to come and go, to believe an act however they choose.

That sounds wonderful; it just doesn't sound very N.T. to me. The Bible doesn't advocate free-range parenting nor does it teach free-range Christian growth. You need the church, and the church needs you to become all that God means for us to become.

We are to be co-workers together helping one another work out what God is working in us.