

Philippians 2:12-30: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 August 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] Philippians chapter 2 verses 12 to 30 Philippians chapter 2 verses 12 to 30 Philippians chapter 2 verses 12 to 30

Philippians chapter 2 verses 12 to 30 Philippians chapter 2 continues the point that Paul has been making since chapter 1 verse 27 Paul is concerned that the Philippians live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ in a manner that is fitting to the grace that they have received and to the master that they serve in the first half of Philippians chapter 2 Paul put forward Christ as an example of the mindset that they should follow showing humility in the way that they treat each other not seeking their own advantage or engaging in self-aggrandizement but taking concern for each other and pursuing a loving unity when we talk about salvation our discussions of it tend to be dominated by the big question of whether someone is in or out as a result we often find ourselves wrong-footed by the teaching on the subject in the new testament here for instance when Paul talks about working out your own salvation with fear and trembling the instinctive response from many is fear of works righteousness and the idea of earning one's own salvation however a very great deal that salvation involves isn't concerned with the question of whether one is in or out with how one gets in or even whether you need to act in a particular way to stay in rather salvation is a term that relates to a far broader reality and we can lose a very great deal when we are simply narrowly fixated upon whether we are in or not immensely important though that concern may be in its proper place perhaps we could compare this to a child who has been wonderfully delivered from life on the streets by being adopted into a rich and loving family by the formal process of adoption they become part of the family they are now in however the whole point of adoption is not the bare formality of being technically in but the rich reality of fellowship love security dignity and authorization that the adopted child enjoys as they live out what it means to be in a child that was very concerned to know whether he was technically adopted but largely ignored his adoptive parents showed no eagerness to join the family at the meal table and consistently behaved in a stubborn and rebellious manner would be making a mockery of the reality of adoption whatever his technical status likewise the content of salvation is not so much the narrow concern of whether or not we are technically in conceived of as little more than a matter of knowing that we aren't going to be eternally alienated from god it is the enjoyment of true peace and communion with god living as those engaged in our father's business as sons and daughters of god experiencing the renewal of our desires and wills by the work of the indwelling spirit knowing relief from guilty conscience in full and free forgiveness living in actual fellowship with god and our neighbors etc etc this is what being in is all about and we get to experience all of this now to some degree through the down payment of the spirit in a foretaste of what we will one day know in fuller measure here paul is concerned to impress upon the philippians the importance of entering into the fullness of the salvation that they have been granted in christ this is something that they need to work out we should all be growing in our knowledge of god's salvation and maturing in our living it out over time we should be living in ways that express the release from bondage that we have been given in christ paul doesn't want the philippians merely to do this for his inspection so that he won't rebuke them in his absence as well as in his presence this should be something that they are pursuing for its own sake if we have besetting sins in our lives we should be working out our salvation there if we have struggles with fear despair or discouragement we should be working out our salvation there if we lack assurance we should be working out our salvation there if we are alienated from a brother or sister we should be working out our salvation there if our love for christ is weak we should be working out our salvation there if we do not find joy in meditating upon the

things of god or if our prayer life is lacking we should be working out our salvation there none of this is done as those who are trying to earn our standing with god we've been given that rather our concern must be to receive most fully the gift of god's grace that we have been given to enter into the very fullest possession of it we must do all of this with fear and trembling as those who have received the most incredible mercy and grace and as those who are living in the presence of a holy god the fear and trembling does not result from the doubtfulness of god's favor towards us from the possibility that god is looking for a chance to trip us up or to withdraw his grace as soon as we fail no as paul goes on to argue we should act in fear and trembling as god himself is at work in us god's grace is active within us to enable us both to desire what is good and to do it god is restoring us in and enabling us to grow in truthful ways of life we must be concerned not to receive his gifts in vain not to treat the grace of our creator as a light thing we must treasure and pursue his grace seeking to enter into the fullest measure of it morna hooker suggests that paul plays off the background of moses farewell discourses in deuteronomy here in a way that contrasts with moses teaching to the unfaithful israelites moses had compared the israelites behavior in his presence with the way that they would behave when he left the scene in chapter 31 verse 27 of deuteronomy for i know how rebellious and stubborn you are behold even today when i am yet alive with you you have been rebellious against the lord how much more after my death paul's statement to the philippians in verse 12 is in many ways the complete inverse of this therefore my beloved as you have always obeyed so now not only as in my presence but much more in my absence again moses describes the israelites in deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 5 they have dealt corruptly with him they are no longer his children because they are blemished they are a crooked and twisted generation the philippians however are not blemished members of a crooked and twisted generation but children of god without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation at the end of the book of deuteronomy the unfaithfulness of israel was a tragic reality that would doom them to experience the full measure of the curse of the covenant however there was the promise held out that after the curse of the covenant had come upon them the lord would circumcise their hearts and the hearts of their children so that as god restored them they would serve him aright perhaps paul is echoing and inverting the text of deuteronomy because he wants the philippians to recognize that in the new covenant which they are experiencing here and now all of this is taking place the philippians are charged to do all things without grumbling or disputing grumbling and disputing were of course the most characteristic sins of the wilderness generation unlike the wilderness generation who failed to enter into possession of the salvation that god held out to them the philippians must hold fast to the word of life persevering in the way of christ so that on the day of the lord when our salvation is consummated in christ's unveiling paul's efforts on their behalf would not turn out to have been in vain as they conduct themselves in a righteous manner holding fast to christ's word of life they will shine like a light in the world displaying this truth to others paul's statements to the israelites were given in the context of his farewell discourse and here paul's thoughts seem to turn to the possibility of his own departure in martyrdom paul presents his possible martyrdom as a sort of drink offering upon the offering of the philippians faith together paul and the philippians are engaged in an act of sacrificial worship in the response to god's grace in the gospel even if paul's death is imminent the worthiness of making such a sacrifice gives him cause to rejoice a rejoicing that he requests that the philippians join him in paul's hope is to send timothy to the philippians soon timothy is paul's sheliac the one who personally represents paul where paul himself cannot be as such timothy participates in the exercise of paul's apostolic ministry he is the co-author of epistles second Corinthians philippians colossians first and second thessalonians philemon he's paul's personal emissary as we see in acts chapter 19 verse 22 and first timothy 1 verse 3 he's the one who served paul so that paul could give himself to his primary task of preaching without any distraction timothy participated directly in paul's exercise of his apostolic power paul and timothy are a pair bound together in a single apostolic mission on occasions the distinction between them is made plain only paul is the apostle proper while on others their alignment and association is stressed timothy is a co-worker helper and sharer in paul's calling relative to the churches to which they were ministering timothy was to be treated as a bearer of paul's own authority however relative to paul timothy was a subordinate without an independent commission of his own but rather a share in paul's the relationship between paul and timothy is exceptionally close and paul speaks of timothy as his own son this language is not merely that of emotional closeness but of representation the son represents the father his authority his presence and his interests it also points to a relationship

similar to that which pertained between old testament leaders and prophets and their shaliacs in numbers chapter 13 verse 16 we see that joshua's name was given to him by moses who also laid his hands on joshua in deuteronomy chapter 34 verse 9 a similar relationship exists between elijah and elisha elisha receives a double portion of elijah's spirit the inheritance appropriate to the firstborn and as elijah is taken into heaven elisha addresses him as his father on this subject matt colvin writes timothy is sent this is the hallmark of an apostle or shaliac indeed both nouns have their roots in the respective verbs to send philippians chapter 2 verse 20 i trust in the lord jesus to send timothy to you shortly that i also may be encouraged when i know your state paul sends timothy to the corinthians in first corinthians chapter 16 verse 10 stating that he is to do the same job as paul himself if timothy comes see that he may be with you without fear for he does the work of the lord as i also do therefore let no one despise him timothy's work is the same as paul's on several other occasions paul mentions that timothy is doing the work of the lord or is a fellow worker with me or a fellow worker with god i would suggest that these terms should be taken as vivid expressions of the shaliac role first of paul as an apostle sent by god or christ to do christ's work and then by timothy who sent by paul as paul's own shaliac is likewise engaged in the same work as his master and is thus as it were a second order shaliac of christ he is referred to by paul as my fellow worker in romans chapter 16 verse 21 first timothy chapter 4 verse 6 refers to timothy as a servant of christ

jesus it is unclear whether this is a more general appellation or refers to his role as the delegate of christ's delegate nonetheless the point is clear timothy is paul's plenipotentiary emissary not a local pastor he stands on one side with paul as christ's representative not on the other side with the seven and other elders as the church's representative he goes on to observe that timothy is a virtual copy of paul is underlined by first corinthians chapter 4 verses 16 to 17 i urge you imitate me for this reason i have sent timothy to you who is my beloved and faithful son in the lord who will remind you of my ways in christ as i teach everywhere in every church the charge to imitate paul is accompanied by the sending of timothy towards the fulfillment of this end as the son is the preeminent imitator and representation of the father as a participant in his father's ministry and as paul's right-hand man timothy had immense authority to wield even being given the commission to choose and appoint church officers as paul's representative on occasions as the apostolic ministry was temporary upon paul's death timothy would presumably have ceased to be the apostle's apostle and would presumably have become a bishop paul has also determined to send epaphroditus to the philippians he is another fellow worker with a close relationship to paul paul gives a threefold description of epaphroditus's relationship to him brother fellow worker and fellow soldier evoking different key governing metaphors for thinking about the church and the service of christ within it the church is a family and fellow members are our brothers and sisters the ministry of the church is like labor in a field or in a building and our companions are fellow workers the church is engaged in a battle against principalities and powers and fighting against enemies within and without and our comrades in this struggle are fellow soldiers epaphroditus was presumably one of the philippians himself and had borne the philippians gift to paul earlier in prison paul would be dependent upon support from friends and relatives and epaphroditus had provided such support from the philippians however he had fallen very seriously ill which the philippians had heard about both epaphroditus and the philippians were deeply distressed by the other party's distress god had granted epaphroditus healing though and now paul is sending him back to the philippians so that they might rejoice to be reunited with their brother in their rejoicing paul himself would be enriched even though he would lose epaphroditus's presence with him as the blessing of others in christ is something that blesses us all paul is concerned that epaphroditus who is likely bearing the letter be welcome back with joy and honor he is a faithful servant who has been obedient in the work of christ almost to the point of death following the example of his master those who perform the work of christ at such personal cost are worthy of honor a question to consider how does the concern that people work out their salvation mark paul's work more generally