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Sermon Notes

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Working Out Your Salvation by the Power of God

Philippians 2:12-13

Introduction: Expect Great Things from God, Attempt Great Things for God

There are few dramatic moments in church history which involve sermons... but some do. Perhaps the most dramatic sermon in church history occurred on May 31, 1792. The preacher could not have been a less likely choice for greatness.

Like many of the greatest men and women of church history, William Carey was born in obscurity and grew up in a humble and rural setting. Because of a rare skin disease that was made worse by exposure to sunlight, Carey's parents decided to have him trained in an indoor trade... thus he was apprenticed to a local shoemaker to learn that trade.

Along the way, Carey came to a strong faith in Christ. As a boy, he loved to read adventure stories, especially about the voyages of Captain Cook in the South Pacific. After his conversion, he began to realize that these people on the far side of the globe needed Christ.

He got a job as a teacher and a pastor, and made a shoe-leather globe to teach his students about geography. It is said that at times while he was teaching his eyes would fall on that globe. Soon Carey would be weeping, crying out, "And these are pagans, pagans!" As he studied and prayed William Carey saw in Christ in Philippians 2 the perfect example of a missionary. He wrote:

"If Christ could stoop so low as to visit our ... sinful world, and be moved with compassion upon the most undeserving and guilty, the most sinful and depraved ...in what better way could we demonstrate that we are partakers of His grace than by earnest endeavor to imitate His example ... by laboring to promote the salvation of the most ignorant and helpless of mankind?"

Carey developed a burning passion for worldwide evangelization. When He addressed the Minister's Fraternal of the Northampton Baptist Association in 1787 concerning missions John Ryland Sr. replied, **"Sit down young man. You are an enthusiast! When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without consulting you or me."** Such a reprimand only served to spur William Carey on in his zeal for missions. In 1792 Carey wrote *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*. This would become the Magna Carta for the modern mission movement.

The year he published that manifesto was the same year as his dramatic sermon. And so he rose to preach on the morning of May 31, 1792, to a group of missions-minded Baptists in Nottingham. The sermon has been called "deathless" and it was a turning point for missions... immediately after preaching it he begged the people with tears to form a missions society and they did... Carey was to be their first missionary. The deathless phrase in the sermon was this:

"Expect great things from God, Attempt Great Things for God!!"

We have seen two infinite journeys in the book of Philippians:

A. Two Infinite Journeys of Philippians

1. Internal journey of sanctification
2. External journey of world-wide disciple-making

William Carey's slogan was focused on the external journey of world-wide missions... and with incredible fruit

I want to challenge you to ADD to it the internal journey of sanctification... growth in holiness:

vs. 12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed-- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence-- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling

for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Reversing the order:

- 1) God is WORKING GREAT THINGS IN YOU, making you more and more like Christ; so EXPECT GREAT THINGS FROM GOD in terms of personal holiness... God can put any evil sin to death in you, He can add any beautiful character trait to you; God can do ANYTHING in terms of sanctification in you... so EXPECT GREAT THINGS FROM GOD
- 2) Therefore, ATTEMPT GREAT THINGS FOR GOD in terms of personal sanctification... make lofty goals of spiritual disciplines, prayer life, putting sin to death, growing in patience, love, humility, gentleness, kindness; witnessing boldly, living simply and selflessly

“Expect great things from God, Attempt Great Things for God!!”

B. The Mystery of the Journey of Salvation

1. Key statement: salvation is a journey, a process, NOT INSTANTANEOUS!!!

Philippians 2:12... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling

3. Problem: neglects the journey of salvation... AND the component parts of salvation

1) Justification THEN 2) Sanctification THEN 3) Glorification

There is no place for our work, effort, or labor in JUSTIFICATION

There is no place for our work, effort, or labor in **GLORIFICATION**

BUT this verse (and many others) confirm forever the place of human work, effort, and labor in **SANCTIFICATION**

C. Deep Mystery: God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in Sanctification

1. Ancient debate in Church History
2. Not enemies to be reconciled but friends which already work together

D. Danger: Pushing to the Extremes

1. Some have so emphasized God's activity that they almost totally deny human effort in sanctification:
 - a. **Quietists**:
 - b. **Quakers**:
 - c. "**Victorious Life**" passively **Let go and Let God**
 - d. **Hyper-Calvinists** we don't have to do any striving in the Christian life... God will do it all!!
 - e. **lazy mainstream evangelicals**, "I've walked the aisle... Once saved, always saved!"

All of these over-emphasize the activity of God to the point of denying the need for constant human striving

On the other hand:

2. Some have so emphasized human activity that they almost totally deny God's sovereignty in sanctification
 - a. **anxious Arminians**:
 - b. **Roman Catholic monks and ascetics**
 - c. **hard-working evangelicals**: anxious about their souls, they forget God's sovereign power so mightily at work in us

There is a deep mystery addressed in these two verses: what role does human effort play in our salvation, and what role does God's sovereign power play? How do the two relate? What does it teach us about free

will? What does it teach us about the security of the believer? How do these two verses motivate us to grow in holiness

II. Questions of Context

A. 1:27 “Live a Life worthy of the Gospel”

B. Philippians 2:12-13: work out your salvation BECAUSE God is at work in you

Philippians 2:14-16 Do everything without complaining or arguing,

so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16 as you hold out the word of life

III. Our Lesser Work: Working Out Salvation

A. Why Our Work is the Lesser Work

B. The Nature of Our Work

1. Consistent, faith-filled obedience to Christ

vs. 12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed-- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence-- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling

2. Hard work and determination

3. Fear and trembling = fear of the Lord, trembling in weakness

John Wesley: “Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth”

IV. God’s Greater Work: God Working In Us

vs. 12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed-- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence-- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling

for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

A. The Primacy of God’s Work in Us

Remember always: God’s work comes first

1. Born again by the power of God

2. You were in total darkness in unbelief...God spoke: let there be light into your soul
3. You were dead in sins...Christ spoke: Lazarus come forth, and you were alive
4. You can do absolutely nothing without him

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

5. What God began by His Spirit He will finish by His Spirit

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

6. How God began is also how He will finish

Galatians 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

B. God's Awesome Energy In Us

"It is God who WORKS in you..."

1. God works in you... word "God" comes first in the clause, emphasizing "Don't forget whose incredible, immense power is at work in you"
2. "works" = Greek, "energeo"... immense energy source
3. great problem in the Christian life: weariness of the journey, sorrow in the struggle... lose strength of will, strength of mind, strength of body; tempted to give up and cease the pilgrimage once and for all
4. God will NEVER let that happen

Isaiah 40:30-31 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Psalms 23:1-3 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

God wisely energizes us daily for the journey, working perfectly with our own wills to rouse us to continue our long journey toward Christlike perfection

5. great need in this journey: absolute confidence in God's power at work in us

Ephesians 1:18-20 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms

Paul deeply wants us to know how much power is at work inside us so that we won't grow weary and lose heart

Illus. Morning Q.T. Alarm rings, I feel like getting out of bed is similar to being raised from the dead... I pray a simple prayer to the Lord... "Get me up, Lord..." and instantly I am up

C. The Two-Fold Effect of God's Power In Us

for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

1) To will 2) To act

1. the great emphasis of free-will theology is that God will NEVER violate our free will

"Another self-imposed limitation to the power of God is the human free will; God never interferes with the free will of men; he always respects the human will. So, there is no predetermination of human actions, as Augustine and many theologians after him said. Human beings are always free." Jairo Mejia

"While God may call sinners to repentance, He never interferes with man's free will-his ability to choose between good and evil. God always respects man's decisions, even if the result is disobedience and sin." George Zgourides

Prime example: Greg Boyd *The God of the Possible*: God cannot know the free choices of human will ahead of time

2. human free will too often seen like a "Holy of Holies" into which God will never enter

3. this verse forever destroys that false view... God makes us willing all the time

for it is God who works in you to will and to act

The human will is an immensely complicated apparatus... the God who designed it to begin with understands it perfectly, and He knows what to do to make you willing to do His will

Ezekiel 36:26-27 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Many prayers in Psalms, the Psalmist asks God to work on his will, his lifestyle, his choices:

Psalms 119:36 Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to dishonest gain.

Psalm 119:133 Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.

So also other statements of Paul's:

2 Thessalonians 3:5 May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

God has power and will over the heart, and he turns it powerfully unto His ways... His will for us becomes little by little our will for us as well

4. God's eternal first step: God makes the plan that we follow

for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

- a. what is God's "good purpose"???
- b. overall, that you should be exactly like Jesus Christ in perfection

Romans 8:28-29 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

God has an eternal plan, and the "BIG PICTURE" of that plan is that all of His chosen ones shall end up absolutely perfect morally, spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally... as perfect as His Son

God also has a "SMALL PICTURE" day by day plan of operations... God as a General is a master of both strategic planning and tactical planning: the big picture goals and the daily objectives

He knows how to save a person like you

Now... the great mystery of how God works in us to WILL while at the same time upholding our personalities and decisions is something we will never fully comprehend

Isaiah 55:9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

- 1) God knows you better than you know yourself... He knows why you make every choice in your life; He knows what tempts you weakly and what tempts you strongly; He knows what bores you, what excites you, what you love and what you hate; He also is absolutely up-to-date in His information about you... every decision you've ever made up to this very instant has a cumulative effect on your personality; God is absolutely up-to-date in where you are at any moment... He knows what an external stimulus will do to you, and how you will react
- 2) God knows Satan and Satan's world system better than Satan himself does; He can control the devil and the world's temptations with perfect wisdom... He NEVER tempts anyone to do evil; but God allows Satan access to you as He wills and chooses.

- 3) God is not passive in the whole process but actively controls events moment-by-moment, playing history like a virtuoso violinist plays the instrument... God is sovereign over events and history... and each happens at each moment to effect God's purpose in your life
- 4) God takes every decision you make and uses it to teach you whatever He wants you to learn; if you choose to sin, He will correct, rebuke, train, and discipline you to bring you to repentance and get you ready for the next issue coming up; if you choose to obey Him, God will encourage and commend you internally and get you ready for the next issue coming up. His work is CONSTANT

John 5:17 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."

God is therefore in a mysterious way able to work in you to will... and from the willing, God works in you to ACT according to His eternal purpose

V. The Relationship Between Our Work and God's Work In Us

vs. 12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed-- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence-- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling

for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

A. God's Plan and God's Energy Are the Ground of Our Planning and Energy

1. Note key word: FOR it is
2. We work BECAUSE He works first in us
3. God's work is the ground and energy of our work
4. This means we are working WITH GOD, doing in ourselves what He already is doing
5. IMPORTANT: This means the persevering effort we make toward sanctification will be blessed by God
 - a. so... set bold goals for spiritual growth: read through the Bible in a year; memorize a whole book of the Bible; pray three times longer than you ever have before; witness boldly and lead someone to Christ; give lots of money away for His Kingdom... set soaring goals, be incredibly bold and confident
 - b. set your face against a besetting sin AND DEFEAT IT by the power of God!!!
 - c. face your day's journey with overwhelming confidence, WHY?

for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

d. you're not on a losing team

Illus. Immense confidence Army of Northern Virginia had in Robert E. Lee; so many victories, they were willing to endure ghastly physical privations because they had soaring confidence that he would bring them the only thing that mattered: victory in battle

In the Battle of the Wilderness, one Confederate soldier named Leonard Gee summed up the feelings of perhaps the entire Army of Northern Virginia:

"I would charge hell itself for that old man."

How much greater should our confidence be in God Almighty, who is undefeated in bringing His people to heaven, through many dangers, toils and snares

He's NEVER LOST ONE YET!! So have soaring confidence in your battle against sin and in your pilgrimage to Christlike maturity in holiness

Christians should have great energy in the Christian life of personal holiness: setting goals, meeting them, repenting if they fail, trying again, optimistic, striving, working hard day after day

B. Eternal Predestination Results in Hard Work for Us

1. Some think the fact that we are predestined to go to heaven means we can sit in an easy chair with the remote and a bag of chips and let God do all the work
2. This doctrine refutes that forever
3. Here are married hard work by us, even with fear and trembling ALONG WITH sovereign energy and grace by an undefeatable God
4. We must WORK HARD EVERY DAY to finish the journey of salvation

Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

5. Some also daunted by God's "INVASIVE" sovereignty

People can be daunted by the idea of an absolutely sovereign God working in their own wills to accomplish His purposes in their lives... they are afraid that such a sovereign God will overwhelm their personality and leave them little more than unthinking robots... nothing could be further from the truth

Illus. Spurgeon talks about one occasion when he went sailing round the West Coast of Scotland. One night they anchored off one of the Hebridean islands. As they approached this island all they could see were

its great high towering mountains. It looked as if it was going to be a source of disaster to the vessel. The captain seemed to be steering directly towards the most dangerous-looking cliffs. At the last moment, just as they came very close to the cliffs they saw that, in fact, there was a small opening that opened up into a lovely bay. They sailed into a quiet harbor and a good anchorage. Then the very mountains and cliffs that had seemed to threaten the little ship became her safety and her security. The wind could blow and the waves could roll but the little ship was as safe as could be because she was under the lee of the great mountain. The two truths we have been thinking of are like that. God's eternal purposes are like a mountain rising up that threatens us but as we come near and when we seek and find this God we discover one of the most precious truths - that God has loved with an everlasting love, and with a love that can never change and a love that will never let go.

Illus. Isaac Watts

Understood sovereign grace's power to change our hearts

“Turn, turn us mighty God,
And mould our souls afresh;
Break, sovereign grace, these hearts of stone,
And give us hearts of flesh.”

But, he also knew none of us will go to heaven on “flowery beds of ease”

“Am I a Soldier of the Cross?” poetically describes how much we must labor to grow in Christ

Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb,
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His Name?

Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God?

Sure I must fight if I would reign;
Increase my courage, Lord.
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word.

Thy saints in all this glorious war
Shall conquer, though they die;

They see the triumph from afar,
By faith's discerning eye

When that illustrious day shall rise,
And all Thy armies shine
In robes of victory through skies,
The glory shall be Thine.

VI. Application

William Carey: "Expect great things from God, Attempt Great Things for God!"

Theodore Roosevelt: "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat."

Be willing to make lofty goals for yourself in the area of Christian growth

Be bold in putting sin to death

Tolerate no ease or comfort in your zeal to be as much like Christ as you can be in this world

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling in five arenas

A. Work out your salvation in **DAILY QUIET TIMES**

1. Bible intake: careful Bible study, memorization, diligent theological study
2. Prayer: be more organized in your prayer life; pray longer and for more people; study what Scripture has to say about prayer; learn what it means to pray without ceasing; add some new prayer habit... perhaps once a month, praying for two hours from 5 to 7 on a Saturday morning for missions and for suffering Christians in other countries

Work out your salvation by determining not to miss a morning quiet time for an entire month

BUT as you do, realize that every Bible truth you take in and every prayer you pray is only by the prior work of God in you... **YOU WORK BECAUSE HE FIRST WORKED IT IN YOU! It is God who worked it in you to will and to act according to His good purpose!!**

B. Work out your salvation in **CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER**

1. Take one attribute, like compassion, for example
2. Ask: "Am I as compassionate on the needy as Christ was? Do I ever weep for the lost? Am I as moved as Christ is for the poverty-stricken nation of Haiti?"

3. If not, set before you as a matter for constant prayer consistent growth in compassion

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling

BUT as you do, realize that every Christlike characteristic you acquire is only by the prior work of God in you...
YOU WORK BECAUSE HE FIRST WORKED IT IN YOU! It is God who worked it in you to will and to act according to His good purpose!!

C. Work out your salvation in **THE BATTLEFIELD OF TEMPTATION**

1. Determine to accept nothing less than Christlike holiness in every moment of temptation
2. Resolve to stand and fight, even if the temptation should last all day

2 Samuel 23:8 These are the names of David's mighty men: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter.

Question: How do you kill 800 men with one spear? Answer: One at a time, for hours on end!!

Be willing to stand your ground against temptation and to suffer rather than to yield... set your sights on perfection, knowing you'll never reach it, but striving boldly nonetheless

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling by determining not to yield to temptation:

BUT as you do, realize that every successful stand against temptation, every act of the will to resist the devil is only by the prior work of God in you... **YOU WORK BECAUSE HE FIRST WORKED IT IN YOU! It is God who worked it in you to will and to act according to His good purpose!!**

D. Work out your salvation in **YOUR FAMILY LIFE**

1. Determine to be the best husband or wife; or the best son or daughter you can be
2. Pray daily for a changed heart
3. Make goals for your Christian life as a family member
4. Take note of besetting sins such as arguments, selfishness, laziness, harshness, unforgiveness... labor to put these to death

Work out your salvation in your family life with fear and trembling:

BUT as you do, realize that every sign of growth, every sweetening in a marriage, every improvement in the obedience of a child to his or her parents is only by the prior work of God in you... **YOU WORK BECAUSE HE FIRST WORKED IT IN YOU! It is God who worked it in you to will and to act according to His good purpose!!**

E. Work out your salvation in **YOUR CHURCH LIFE**

1. Develop your spiritual gifts fully
2. Get active in church life... in serving, in tithing, in corporate worship, in fellowship, in prayer, in sacrifice
3. Attend regularly; watch over your brothers and sisters in prayer and love; confront straying members with gentleness and humility

Work out your salvation in your church life with fear and trembling:

BUT as you do, realize that every step of progress you make as a faithful church member is only by the prior work of God in you... **YOU WORK BECAUSE HE FIRST WORKED IT IN YOU! It is God who worked it in you to will and to act according to His good purpose!!**

F. Work out your salvation in **EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS**

1. Determine to make growing in evangelism a high priority in the year 2004
2. Prepare yourself to witness by memorizing a gospel outline with supporting Scriptures
3. Saturate your day in prayer, asking for opportunities to witness
4. Take risks in relationships so that you can lead someone to Christ

Work out your salvation as a witness for Christ with fear and trembling:

BUT as you do, realize that every new victory, every time you conquered your own fear and spoke up for Christ in a checkout line, at a soccer practice, or at a school meeting is only by the prior work of God in you... **YOU WORK BECAUSE HE FIRST WORKED IT IN YOU! It is God who worked it in you to will and to act according to His good purpose!!**

Three expectations

- Expect to suffer... suffer in the process, suffer some setbacks because of the flesh, suffer opposition from others... suffer as Christ did
- Expect to make real, noticeable progress in your Christian life
- Expect to be 100% successful in the end: in every way you will be like Christ in heaven

When you stumble, get right back up again, confess your sins, and renew the assault on righteousness by the power of God

When you succeed, be happy... BUT

Remember what John Piper says: **GOD GETS THE GLORY, WE GET THE JOY!!!**