

Talk – Phil 2:12-30 – Shine Like Stars

Bible Reading

Philippians 2:12-30

Central Truth

Living out the gospel in the World according to God's good purpose

Purpose

I want to listener to be equipped to live out the gospel before the eyes of the world in a way that is honouring to Christ.

Outline

A Light in a Dark Place

Shine like Stars

1. Directive

- obey and work
- do [without self-interest]
- be blameless and pure
- shine
- hold firmly

Qualities of the Christian life...

- The Christians work should _____
- The Christians character _____
- The Christians testimony _____

Timothy (2:19-24)

2. Assurance

- God is at work in you

Epaphroditus (2:25-30)

- Children of God

Live out the gospel in the World according to God's Good Purpose

CHECK TIME

Talk

A Light in a Dark Place

- Here is something for those fans of Plato's Philosophy...

[READ – below the extract from Max Lucado's 'A Gentle Thunder – Hearing God through the Storm', Texas: Word, 1995, pp181-83.]

Long ago, or maybe not so long ago, there was a tribe in a dark cold cavern.

The cave dwellers would huddle together and cry against the chill.

Loud and long they wailed.

It was all they did. It was all they knew to do.

The sounds of the cave were mournful, but the people didn't know it, for they had never known joy.

But then, one day, they heard a different voice.

'I have heard your cries,

I have felt your chill and I have seen your darkness.

I have come to help.'

The cave people grew quiet. They had never heard this voice before.

Hope sounded strange to their ears.

'How can we know you have come to help?'

'Trust me', he answered, *'I have what you need'*

The cave people peered through the darkness at the figure of the stranger.

He was stacking something, then stooping, and stacking more.

'What you are doing?' one cried, nervous.

The stranger didn't answer.

'What are you making?' one shouted even louder.

Still no response.

'Tell us!' demanded a third.

The visitor stood and spoke in the direction of the voices.

'I have what you need.'

And with that he turned to the pile at his feet and lit it.

Wood ignited, flames erupted, and light filled the cavern.

Talk – Phil 2:12-30 – Shine Like Stars

The cave people turned away in fear.

Put it out! they cried.
'It hurts to see it.'

'Light always hurts before it helps', he answered.

'Step closer. The pain will soon pass'

'Not I' declared a voice.

'Nor I' agreed a second.

'Only a fool would risk exposing his eyes to such light'

The stranger stood next to the fire.

*'Would you prefer the darkness?
'Would you prefer the cold?'*
'Don't consult your fears. Take a step of faith.'

For a long time, no one spoke.

The people hovered in groups covering their eyes.
The fire builder stood next to the fire.
'It is warm here' he invited.

'He's right', one from behind him announced – *'its warmer'*.

The stranger turned and saw a figure slowly stepping toward the fire.

'I can open my eyes now', she proclaimed, *'I can see!'*

'Come closer' invited the fire builder.

She did. She stepped into the ring of light.

'It's so warm!'
She extended her hands and sighed as the chill began to pass.

'Come everyone! Feel the warmth' she invited.

'Silence woman!' yelled one of the cave dwellers.

*'Dare you lead us into your folly?
Leave us. Leave us and take your light with you.'*

She turned to the stranger. *'Why don't they come?'*

'They chose the chill, for though it's cold, it's what they know. They'd rather be cold than change.'

'And live in the dark?'

'And live in the dark'

Talk – Phil 2:12-30 – Shine Like Stars

PAUSE

Prayer

Lord and Father

You sent your Son Jesus into the world – humbling himself to even death on a cross.

You exalted him to the highest place – where he now exalts all those who believe and live for him.

Lord as we listen to your word today – help us to discern that which speaks of light and that which confirms darkness – and give us the wisdom to be able to discern the difference.

AMEN

- Today we look at the second half of Philippians chapter 2 – in fact I am going to concentrate on verses 12-18.
- We are reading a letter, writing by the Apostle Paul to a Church in the city of Philippi.
- It is a young church – they weren't meeting in an established building with a long history like we have here.
- There would not have been thousands or even hundreds in the church.
- But they were a church who were concerned about praying and partnering with Paul in gospel ministry.
- And he wants them to know how to *live out the gospel in the World according to God's purpose.*

Shine like Stars

- At the beginning of Chapter 2 Paul writes what is now called a Christological hymn. An amazing statement of faith – it tells the good news about Jesus.
 - Jesus in very nature God, humbled himself, made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant (verses 6-7)
 - In fact, he humbled himself by being willing to die – on a cross (verse 8)
 - As a result, God exalted Jesus to the highest place
 - And gave him a name that is before all others (verse 9).
 - It is to Jesus that every knee should bow in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (verses 10-11)
- That good news, the gospel – which may have seemed unimpressive in the eyes of the World – was certainly very impressive to God.
- And Paul wants this church to live out that gospel in a way that rightly exalts Jesus.
- How do they do that?
- What follows is Paul's attempt to explain that to them – and then he offers both Timothy and Epaphroditus as examples.

Talk – Phil 2:12-30 – Shine Like Stars

- I want you to notice that Paul is both ***directive and reassuring***.

Directive

- Look at 2:12 – *‘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, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.’*
- In verses 12 to 16 he gives several directives – you’ll also notice that these directives are things that *can be seen* by the world.
- First, verse 12 - **obey and work**
 - The Philippians obviously have a reputation – Paul encourages them to continue in their *obedience*.
 - *‘as you have always obeyed, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence’*
 - There is a test of obedience.
 - Notice how Paul praises them for being obedient not just when he is with them, but when he is absent.

Illustration

- We all know that funny thing that happens within us when we know we are being watched – it is so much easier to do the right thing!
 - The child in the playground when the principal walks by.
 - The worker in the firm when the boss is in view.
 - The driver of the car when you know that the police are near.
- But the true test of obedience comes when you are obedient even when there is no authority watching.
- This church in Philippi is a good example.
- They have been obedient when Paul was with them *and* when he wasn’t.
- So Paul says, in your obedience, work – *‘work out your salvation with fear and trembling’*
 - Does this mean that it is possible for a person to work out – to carve out, to earn their salvation?
 - No, it says ‘work out’, not ‘work for’ your salvation.
 - This church should be living as ones who are saved – giving reverence to the one who has saved them, and then as they do, they will ‘work out’ more deeply what it means to be saved.
- *Illustration*
 - I love a good rescue story.

Talk – Phil 2:12-30 – Shine Like Stars

- A drama happens and someone who was at great peril is saved – they might not know who or how the rescue has been brought about – they just know they are saved.
- It is only after the rescue that the true extent of what went into their salvation becomes clear.
- They learn about how perilous their situation in fact was, they meet the rescuer, they learn about what went into the rescue, they hear about who was involved.

- When Paul says ‘work out your salvation in fear and trembling’ he is saying, find out what went into your rescue – realise just how perilous your situation was, get to know your rescuer, and learn more about what Jesus has done for you.
- You owe your life to this rescuer so it makes sense that you now do what he says – work and obey.

PAUSE

- Second directive, verse 14 – **do** [*without self-interest*]
 - *Do everything without grumbling or arguing.*
 - Paul does not specify *what* this church should do, but *how* they should do it – it’s not *a course* of action, it’s a *kind* of action.
 - Grumbling or arguing (for whatever the reason) – they are traits that are often motivated by self-interest.
 - If they are to show their humility like that of Christ (as described in the first part of the chapter) then it is inappropriate to grumble and argue out of self-interest.
 - That is a big call – especially since he says ‘**Do everything** without grumbling or arguing’.

Application

- Now won’t this be a challenge for some of us?!
- If I think about the things I grumble about – most of the time my grumbings are motivated by some selfish desire.
- There is a rebuke here for me to take on board.

- Third directive, verse 15 - **be blameless and pure**
 - Here we see the reason for not grumbling or arguing out of self-interest – it is so that this church might be seen to be blameless and pure – another way of saying innocent.
 - We have already heard the charge to be ‘*pure and blameless*’ back in Chapter 1:10 – Paul prays that the Philippians would grow in love and knowledge and discernment so that they may know what is good and right – and so when Christ does return they would be *pure and blameless*.

 - Now in chapter 2 he says ‘*be blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault’’* – not only before Jesus, but before the world.

Talk – Phil 2:12-30 – Shine Like Stars

- This is all about being blameless and innocent – that is – being people whom others cannot find fault with.
- That is a tall order.
- Paul wants the Philippians to let go of the worldly selfish concerns they may have and work out their salvation in a blameless and innocent manner.
- His encouragement is that when you do that – others will see.
- The contrast in this verse is with the world – with the warped and crooked generation.

Explanation:

- Paul wants the Philippians to realize that they have been adopted by God and are now spoken for by Christ.
- And as members of Christ's family – they need to ensure they represent the family in an honorable way – in fact in a blameless and pure way.

Application:

- The application for the Christian person today should be pretty obvious.
- Live in such a way that you don't bring shame upon the Christian family name.

- Fourth directive, also verse 15 - **shine**.
 - Shine among the world like stars in the sky.
 - Each of these directives have built upon the other.
 - To shine in a warped and crooked generation – will be the result of being obedient, working, without grumbling or arguing, and living in a blameless and pure way under the watchful eyes of the world.
 - The picture of shining like stars in the sky is beautiful.

 - Let's dwell a moment on this picture.
 - To shine...
 - is that to be so bright and illuminating that you shine out *giving light to the world* – like a torch would down a dark alleyway?
 - Or does it mean that you should *shine distinctively*, to stand out against all the blackness so that people are drawn to you like a fire in a cold cave?
 - Or does it mean, given this is written to a church, to shine collectively like the stars in the sky and by being so captivating and attractive – that people will look at you and see Jesus.
 - Well the answer to that I think comes in what follows – the final directive – to hold firmly to the word of life.

- Finally in verse 16 – **hold firmly**

Talk – Phil 2:12-30 – Shine Like Stars

- The way our NIV Bibles translate this verse is very helpful. It does not say *hold out the word*, but rather *hold firmly to the word* of life.
- Paul is saying to this church - hold firmly to the word of life.
- I think this is important because it helps us understand what it really means 'to shine'.
- To shine a light into the world, and to shine so distinctively so that others are drawn to you – you have to first know what your light source is.
- If Christians hold firmly to the word of life (the life source), then the intent of shining is more like the idea of being so beautiful that the world will want to see what it is that Christians have.

- And when something is so beautiful it not only directs attention like a torch would in a dark alley, but it also draw people in like the fire should in a cold cave.

- Paul says that Christians should be like this light – why, because they have the word of life and they hold to it firmly.
 - The word of life is a simple way of talking about scripture – because it is through scripture that we come to meet God and it is through scripture where we understand best what Jesus did to rescue.
 - The word of life has two functions
 - it is a) a message that tells of life and also
 - b) a message that gives the life that it talks about.
 - Without the word of life we cannot be Christian.

 - And it is with the word of life that Christians, as Paul puts it in verse 16, that Christians can boast on the day of Christ that they did not run or labour in vain.

PAUSE

- So, 5 directives – Obey and work, do - without self-interest, in a blameless and pure manner, to shine, because the word of life is lived out in you.
- 5 directives which should be - seen by the world.

- When you think about the sacrifice Christ made to save – then a call to obey and work, to do without self-interest, to live blamelessly and pure, and to shine in the world, by holding firmly to the word of life – it does not seem that much of a burden or obligation. It is a privilege.
- They are all **qualities of the Christian life**.
 - The Christians work should have the marks of Christ.
 - The Christians character should imitate Christ
 - The Christians testimony should be that of Christ.

- Paul obviously knows this life and wants to share it around.

Talk – Phil 2:12-30 – Shine Like Stars

- As if imitating Christ – in verses 17-18 he offers himself - gladly and willingly – even if it means losing his life for the faith - and he asks the church in Philippi to do the same.
- He says *'even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.'*
- In fact, if you were to read on into verses 19 through to 24, you would see that Paul puts up Timothy as an example
- Timothy shines
 - – he has shown genuine concern for the welfare of the Philippians,
 - he has done that in a way that is uncommon – where others have looked to through own interests, he has done the opposite
 - – he has proved himself and has served the work of the gospel.

Application

- Friends, we are not the church of Philippi, but if Trinity is your church because you have been rescued by Jesus, then the directives which Paul offers them, are just as applicable as what he offers us.
- And so, let me ask –
 - Are you holding firmly to the word of Life – does it shape you in a way that others can see?
 - Are you shining, together with others who also stand in faith – in such a way that you are visibly different to the world around?
 - Are there things in the world that you need to let go of in order to be blameless and pure?
 - Where is it that your self-interest shows itself most visibly to others.
 - And are you working obediently such that you are living out the gospel in the World – even when others are not watching?

LONG PAUSE

Assurance

- Okay, I said that Paul was both directive and reassuring.
- We have looked at the directives – now look at how he reassures the church in Philippi - in two ways.
- First, in verse 13 – **God is at work in you**
 - Paul says *'it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose'*
 - God's purpose is good - and he works in the Philippians according to that good purpose.
 - That means, that no matter what happens – there is a God-made reason.

Talk – Phil 2:12-30 – Shine Like Stars

- None of the directives given by Paul here would make any sense if God had not already been working in the hearts and minds of the Philippians.
- There is *a great assurance* in the fact that God is working for them and in them.
- And there is *a great comfort* in knowing that God is bringing about his purposes through them – regardless of the result.

- In fact, the working example is Epaphroditus, whom Paul speaks about in verses 25-30.
 - Epaphroditus was sent to Paul by the Philippians to care for his needs – you would think that would be a good plan under God.
 - That plan was interrupted because Epaphroditus got sick, in fact he nearly died – yet even in this bad situation, God used him to care for Paul’s needs.
 - This letter announces that Epaphroditus is returning to Philippi, not because he failed in what he was planning to do, but because God’s plan was that he return so that he could be cared for and also be someone who offered comfort to the church in Philippi.

- So, the first assurance - God is at work in you.

- The second assurance springs out of the first. It is in verse 15 – Paul reminds them **they are the Children of God**.
 - In many ways this is the truth that holds the whole passage together.
 - It is a wonderful honour and privilege to be a child of God.
 - Being a child of God means being effectively adopted – and adopted by the ruler of the world.
 - What privilege. What spoils. What responsibility.

- But being a child of God comes at a great cost – it came at the death of the Son of God.
- And so, this is an assurance that Paul wants his readers to hold on to – they can be confident, as they remember the cross.
 - They can be bold and shine, but only as they hold firmly to the Word of Life.

- Being a child of God connects them to Jesus.
- Being a child of God connects them to Paul – and in the rest of Chapter 2 connects them to Timothy and Epaphroditus and to others who share the same faith.
- Being a child of God connects them to us – and we to them – because we remember what Jesus has done for us to bring us into the light.
- Being a child of God means that together we can shine the light of Jesus to the World.
- So, the second assurance – you are a Child of God.

Talk – Phil 2:12-30 – Shine Like Stars

PAUSE

Live out the gospel in the World according to God's Good Purpose

- Let me bring this to a close.
- What is the message that Paul wants this small Church in Philippi to hear?
It is – Live out the gospel in the World according to God's good purpose.
- The assurance he offers is the reminder that God works through his children.
- The message that Paul wants Christians today to hear is to live out the gospel in the World according to God's good purpose.
- So, like a sky full of stars – hold firmly to the word of life, shining brightly, in blameless and pure ways, without self-interest, to do God's work obediently.
- And be assured that God will work though you.

The cave dweller reflected on what the stranger had said...

'They chose to live in the dark'

The now warm woman stood silent.
Looking first at the dark then at the man.

'Will you leave the fire?' He asked.

She paused, then answered, *'I cannot. I cannot bear the cold'*

Then she spoke again.
'But nor can I bear the thought of my people in darkness.'

'You don't have to' he responded, reaching into the fire and removing a stick.
*'Hold firmly to this – and carry it to your people.
Tell them the light is here, and the light is warm.
Tell them the light is for all who desire it.'*

And so, she took the small flame and stepped into the shadows.

Let's pray

*Father help us to continue to work out our salvation in the light of what you have done for us.
And help us to shine like stars in a world that often prefers the darkness.
We ask this because of Jesus. AMEN.*