

Shine like stars
Philippians 2:14-16a

Introduction:

It always amazes me how the Holy Spirit works in the people and the teaching in the church. There are several times when in Sunday School we will have a discussion around a particular text to Scripture. Then when we get into the morning service the same topics or truths are taught during the message, or we will have questions that get answered during the morning message. Today, in a similar way, the Lord in his providence layed a particular passage on my heart about a month ago. I had no idea at that time that pastor would be preaching the week before about being the light of the world. Today we are going to continue this theme. However, let me take a minute to explain how I got to the passage we are going to look at today.

Last month we were up in northern Ohio for a family reunion. That Sunday we went to church with my dad, and there was something in that message that hit me. The Holy Spirit was using the truth in that message to bring to light an area of my life that needed to be corrected. It wasn't even the main point of the message. They were in the middle of a sermon series on spiritual disciplines, and the topic for that day was the discipline of celebration. It was good to think about that often forgotten discipline; however, it was one of the enemies of this discipline that convicted me. I would like to share some of those thoughts with you today.

When thinking about this enemy the Lord brought back a verse that came in handy my first summer of counseling at Scioto Hills. We were studying the book of Philippians that summer, this is one of the natural verses to go to when the kids were starting to act like many kids do when tired. What do kids do when they get tired? They whine, get grouchy, complain, and start getting really selfish which leads to petty arguments. If I am honest, Bethany and I have quoted this verse from time to time with our kids. They get into moods where they are whining and complaining about everything. It's a good thing we grow out of this type of behavior as adults...right?

The reality is, we don't. And the more I have studied this passage there is way more at stake than just getting kids/adults to behave differently. As in all cases, that sinful behavior reveals a heart attitude, and will hinder our ability to share the gospel with those around us. So let's get started...

Context:

We will be in Philippians chapter 2 this morning. As you turn to that chapter in your copy of God Word, let me take a moment to set the context. In the beginning of chapter 2 Paul is encouraging the believers in Philippi to imitate Christ. To see his example of how he lived in the midst of trials and follow his example. Now, I think it's worth mentioning that Paul is not talking about earning salvation. Remember, Paul is writing to a church that he was instrumental in establishing, and then was run out of town shortly after. He wanted to encourage them to continue in their faith in the midst of persecution. Then Paul encourages them to "work out their salvation". Ultimately Paul is pointing them to sanctification. The process by which we are becoming, growing, changing to look more and more to our positional standing before the Lord. This process is not something that takes place without intentionality. In fact, Paul says to do this with fear and trembling. He knows the heart and that it can wander and deceive. We must approach sanctification with humility and grace.

With that in mind let's read the passage before us today.

Philippians 2: 14-16a - ¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life.

1) Stop Complaining

The first thing we see in this passage is Paul telling the church of Philippi to stop "grumbling and arguing". Grumbling, whispering, complaining. It has been amazing to me how much this type of activity is throughout all of Scripture. The Israelites complained and wanted to go back to Egypt. We will talk more about that one later. The Disciples complained about how hard it was to understand his teaching in Matthew chapter 6. In Matthew 7:12 it says, "12 Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people."" From these verses you can get a sense of the type of behavior Paul is exhorting the people not to participate. He is talking about a negative type of comment that is not helpful for anyone or anything other than to voice your displeasure. Yes, it was present in the Scriptures, but we have so much more now. We don't have anything to complain about, right? We are not under any type of persecution. Look at all the modern technology we have. Look at the comforts and conveniences we enjoy on a regular basis. Except... How much time have you spent with a toddler lately? Have you talked to a high school student

about how school is going? Have you listened to yourself lately? There was some questionable calls in the game the other day. How did that go? They are doing construction in New Boston again. What was your response when you saw that on your way to work? What was the first thought in your head when you got the latest political headlines? The temperature is not exactly where you like it in the room right now. The music wasn't exactly your style during worship. How did conversation go in the break room this week? Did the boss or teacher do anything you didn't like this week? How are you going to react when the service at the restaurant is slow after church? Servers don't just hate working on Sundays because church people are bad tippers, but also they complain the most.

I could keep going on and on, but I think you are starting to get the picture. This is something that is everywhere. Paul also warns us about arguing. Some of the arguments I hear in the classroom are interesting. Sometimes, I will hear the students start arguing over a petty or trivial matter while working on a worksheet or project. They don't know this, but I will listen in for a minute. One reason is to make sure things don't get out of hand, but if I am honest, there is a level of entertainment in some of these discussions. Most of the time there is not solution to these arguments, and the students get to the point they just want to win. As adults we don't grow out of having these arguments that have no solution or are just to prove you are right; we just get more sophisticated in how we hide our arguments. We hide behind an electronic device. Evaluate most of social media and forums on the interwebs. What was the tone of your last email pointing out how you have been wronged. The company messed up your bill or did not send what you ordered. Did your phone conversation with them adorn Christ? Was it full of truth and grace?

I think it is obvious that this type of behaviour is all around us! The question is, of all the things Paul could bring up, why point out their need to stop complaining and arguing? Remember the Church in Philippi was experiencing persecution! Paul was run out of town rather quickly, and the church experiencing some of those same difficulties. Maybe this was the reputation of the church, and Paul needed to address it as part of their growing in sanctification. They had grown weary of the persecution and it had caused them to state questioning the goodness of the Lord. That may be true, but I think it is much more fundamental than that. When we complain and argue, we are making a declaration of who we are and who God is in light of that, and that is a dangerous place to be. The reason we act this way is because we feel as if we have certain rights and expectations that we deserve, and when those are not met we react...often times in the sinful desires of our hearts.

Remember our methodology always indicates our theology. What we truly believe will show up in the way that we live our lives. In our pride we have come to expect a certain level of comfort and treatment, and when that doesn't happen we make sure people around us know we are unhappy. We start with the wrong perspective. We need to start by making a declaration of who God is and who we are in light of Him! We need to start with who God is, holy, just, righteous, loving, grace filled, sovereign, and then move to we are in relation to Him! We are sinners, enemies deserving of nothing but the wrath of a holy God, and only by His grace and reaching out to us we have been brought into His family. He sent his Son to die on a cross to pay the punishment for our sins, He came after us when we wanted nothing to do with Him, He changed our heart of stone to a heart of flesh, He gave us the faith to believe and repent. It is only because of His grace we have anything. Therefore, we owe everything to Him.

If that is not your story, it can be. If you have not by faith accepted the free gift of salvation, today is the day of salvation.

Ultimately, it boils down to this, when we complain and argue we are making a statement of discontentment and protest to the providence of the Lord. We are saying, "God I know you are in control, but I feel like you got this one area in my life wrong." Paul had just finished saying in verse 13, "it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure." He is in control and his glory is his number one concern. In addition to his glory we need to remember the promise of the Lord, "that all things work out for the good of those who love Him." (Rom 8) His will is for his glory and our good, but when we start looking for our glory or what we think is good, that is when we start to complain and argue. John MacArthur puts it this way, "It [complaining] is an emotional rejection of God's providence, will, and circumstances for one's life." Complaining and arguing is not just an innocent minor annoyance; rather, it is a declaration to the King of Kings that He is doing it wrong, and revealer of the pride in your heart.

Now I know that not everything in this sin cursed world is full of sunshine and roses. There are problems, inaccuracies, sins, improvements that need to be addressed. It stands to reason that it is possible to identify, talk about, and address these without having a heart attitude of grumbling. How do we do this? This is one of the questions that will be discussed in community groups today, however, let me give you a few ideas to get you started. 1) Are you trying to be part of the solution? I have heard it said before that before you point out an issue, have a solution in mind, and be willing to be part of the solution. We have

plenty of opinionated people give answer to anything, but we need people willing to get their hands dirty in fixing/improving the issue. 2) We need to do better in the Biblical discipline of lament. Now this can be a whole message in and of itself, but here is the gist. We see plenty of people throughout Scripture bring complaints and questions to the Lord. Abraham, David, Solomon, Habbakak to just name a few. When we see them complain or question it is real and honest; however, it also has a second part that includes a "but God I will trust". Too many times we complain, but don't take the next step to affirm the Lord sovereign will. We also have to be ok with the answer the Lord give, even if it's not what you were wanting/expecting. 3) What are you wanting out of those venting sessions. How do you respond when the person holds you accountable for your part in the situation?

Transition: When we live a life free from complaining and arguing we will stand out. We will look different, in an attractive way, from the world around us.

2) So we can shine like stars

Last week we Pastor gave a message about being the light of the world. This is one way we can live out that light. According to verse 15 we live in a "crooked and twisted" world. These words describe the world, culture, and people as being away from the standard, perverse, misleading. That's not a very happy or bright picture, but this is the world we live in, the people we live among, the way we still act at times. This line is a reference to Moses' song in Deuteronomy. In fact, the NIV puts quotation marks in as if Paul is directly quoting, Deuteronomy 32:5-6, "They are corrupt and not his children; to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation. 6 Is this the way you repay the Lord, you foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?" Paul wants the church to remember this history, remember this story and learn from it. Here is this part of Israel's story, Moses is telling the next generation about the Lord and why they have been walking in circles in the dessert for so long. This is how the people of God were described. Remember, they were rescued from slavery in Egypt, and then didn't like how the Lord was providing for them. They then started complaining and asking to go back to Egypt. How crazy is that! They showed that they had a lack of faith and trust in the Lord.

This is how an unbelieving world acts today crooked, perverse, and dark. However, we have been set free from that. We have been made a new creation. We have no condemnation. We have been made blameless and pure. We are children of the Living God. Now we need to live like all of that is true. Ephesians 4 puts it this way, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling

you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Peace, that sounds like the opposite of complaining and arguing, and it is! When we live as we should we show the world peace and hope, something they are longing for in their own lives.

This is how we shine like stars. I love this imagery for a few reasons! The world can't help but notice the stars. We are fascinated by them. When we take the time to slow down in life we just find ourselves looking up. Everyone does. We see the brightness and beauty. The word used here in this section has a sense of decoration. Why do we decorate the things around us? It is to make things more attractive. Brothers and sisters, are you making the gospel and Christ more attractive by the way you live. It is not only by what you choose to do and not do, although that is part of it, but it's by your attitude, priorities, reactions, etc.

It is the difference between artificial light and natural light. I have noticed this in our house. We open the blinds to allow for more light, and the natural light drowns out the artificial light in the house. I love going around looking at Christmas lights. I like to see people's creativity, the way the kids react, and appreciate the time and effort put into the display. There are some really elaborate displays, but they all fall short of the stars or sunset. What is the difference? It's the source of the power. You see when we try to live differently by just following a list of dos and don'ts its like looking at a light show. It's cool, impressive, and even admirable. It will attract some. I remember going through a cave tour at Carter Caves. We experienced absolute darkness, until the guide turned on his flashlight. That artificial light was attractive, but our eyes still needed adjusted when we walked outside. On the other hand, when we live a life in the power of our salvation is like looking at the stars. People can tell the power source is from something different, something better, something that is worth tapping into. Pastor put it this way last week in his sermon, "This is what the world should be able to see when they look at our lives. Beautiful, attractive, good works. We ought to be doing the kinds of things that speak well of our beautiful and worthy Savior, who of course is the One who is shining through us." We are called to live differently, not in a weird or odd way, but rather in an attractive way.

Is the way you live your life attractive to those around you. Not the things you do and don't do, of course a sinner would have different priorities. I am talking about your love, peace, hope, purpose in life. Is that attractive. Are you showing that the gospel can have a real impact in the real issues of life.

Transition: Of course we cannot stop there. People can admire what they are seeing and not understand what it is. I mean, think back to the Lion King! Even Simba, Timon, and Pumba spent time looking at the stars. However, without instruction they came to a conclusion that was complete heresy. That is why we need to make Him known.

3) Making Christ known (16a)

The word for "hold fast" has two meanings. The first one is stand upon, place a mark. It makes me think of a firm foundation. Another way to think of it is a mark on a map. Think about hiking a new trail. When you reach the campsite, you place a mark on the map as a way to look back at it as a point of reference. That is what the gospel can do for us. As we are navigating this life, we can always have the cross in our vision to help us with decisions, perspective, and priorities. Remember the Gospel is not only something we need for salvation; it is also needed to live a life of godliness.

The second meaning of the word "hold fast" is to give out as well. The King James Version uses the term "holding forth". This gives a more accurate sense of the words two meanings. The word forth is not used in everyday language, but I always think of the phrase "go forth and conquer". Yes, we are to hold tight to the word of life, but that should enable us to give it to others. John MacArthur puts it this way, "Here it refers to believers holding out or offering something for others to take." How do you hold out and offer something that they do not understand. It is clear that as they are living for the Lord and standing firm on the word of life; they are also talking about what allows them to live differently. 1 Peter 3:15-16 says, "15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."

What is that hope? It is the "word of life". In the larger sense this is referring to all of Scripture. However, more specifically the word of life is the gospel. This is Paul's labor. Paul worked his whole ministry life to see the gospel be spread to the Gentiles. He not only wanted to believe, but he longed to see the people of the church to grow in the spirit. This will lead them to be reproducers. He wanted to see his children in the faith to not just live a private life in the faith, but to also live and share the gospel. Whoever coined the phrase "always be sharing the

gospel and when necessary talk" was off. Though I can see what they were trying to convey. It takes more than just living rightly, we must be willing and able to share the gospel when the moment arrives. We never know when the Lord will bring those divine appointments our way. I pray we'll have eyes to see the opportunity, boldness to take advantage of the opportunity, and wisdom to share the gospel more accurately.

Warren Wiersbe sums up this passage this way, "In Philippians 2:14-15, Paul contrasts the life of the believer with the lives of those who live in the world. Unsaved people complain and find fault, but Christians rejoice. Society around us is "twisted and distorted," but the Christian stands straight because he measures his life by God's Word, the perfect standard. The world is dark, but Christians shine like bright lights. The world had nothing to offer, but the Christian holds out the Word of life, the message of salvation through faith in Christ. In other words, as we allow God to achieve this purpose in our lives, we become better witnesses in the world that desperately needs Christ."

Application:

1) Preach the gospel to yourself daily

We need to be reminded daily of the blessing of the gospel. Our view on life can get off course so quickly. This is the importance of the spiritual disciplines.

2) Gain perspective

1) Talk to those who have experienced something different. Read biographies and stories about what is happening to the church around the world. We are blessed...

2) Listen. Often times, we complain and argue before we have the whole picture. Do not assume you know all the information...

3) Celebrate the Lord

The big things, the little things, all things...