

August 16, 2009
Pentecost 11
Philippians Sermon Series

“Shining Like Stars”

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

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 according to his good purpose. ¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵ 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-- in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Have you seen the stars lately? I am not talking about the “stars” of Hollywood that you see in the tabloids or on television, or the stars of the sports world that are featured on the evening news. I am talking about the stars in the sky, the stars our heavenly Father has placed into the night sky to dazzle us with his glory. Think of that time when you were camping or traveling in some remote area. You looked up at the stars in the night sky and were overwhelmed at their vastness and beauty. Billions of stars in our galaxy and billions of galaxies in the universe look down on us and proclaim the glory of God to us. Psalm 19 says “the heavens declare the glory of God.” In Isaiah the Lord tells us that he brings out the starry hosts and “calls them each by name.”

The reason we see the stars at night is because they stand out in the darkness. In a similar way the Apostle Paul says that we are to shine like stars in a world of darkness. He calls it “a crooked and depraved generation.” Think of the darkness that exists in people you know personally and how much they need the light of God’s love in Jesus to shine through you to reach them. Peter writes in his letter that we are to “declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Paul was a prisoner, under house arrest in Rome. He was surrounded by Roman guards who were living in the darkness. He had an opportunity to shine like a star into the dark world that surrounded him. That same privilege of shining like stars has also been given to us as a congregation in this community and as individual Christians living our lives to God’s glory.

Shining by God’s grace

It is the Lord who has placed the stars in the sky exactly where he wants them to shine for his glory. It is the Lord who has also chosen you by his grace to believe in Jesus as your Savior and to live your life for him at this moment and this place in history. Listen again to what Paul writes, “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.” He calls on us work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Notice that it does not say, “Work for your

salvation" or "Work at your salvation." He calls on us to "work it out" and to let it show itself in our lives in how we live among people who are not Christian.

The all important salvation or rescue from sin that you have in Jesus is something God accomplishes for you. When Jesus made the full ransom payment for you sin and mine he cried out from the cross, "It is finished." That was his way of saying he has done it all for you. The Lord was also responsible for giving you the gift of faith to believe in what Jesus has done for you. The two greatest moments in history for you happened when Jesus died and rose from the dead, and when the Lord worked the faith in you to believe you are saved through what Jesus has done. Now we work out our salvation, we show it in how we live our lives, so others will become curious and want to learn about what Jesus has done for them.

Let me illustrate how this work with this glove of garlic. I once knew an elderly lady who ate massive doses of garlic. You could not be near her without smelling the garlic. Fortunately she did not work out and sweat or she would have smelled even more like garlic as it comes out of your pores. When you are a Christian the salvation you have in Christ begins to come out of you, almost out of your pores, in everything you do out of love for the Lord.

Another way to understand this verse about working out our salvation is to think of salvation in three ways: the past, the present and the future. I was saved (past tense) when Jesus died for my sins and rose from dead. I was saved (past tense) when the Lord brought me to believe in what Jesus has done for me, and turned me around from putting my trust and hope in myself. It is also proper to say, "I will be saved." Some day the Lord will save us from this present world and take us home to be with him in the place he has prepared for us. I can also say, "I am being saved," speaking in the present tense. Every day is glorious opportunity to work together with the Lord to say "no" to the destructive forces of sin and live a new life for Jesus. And what a comfort it is to know the Lord who has saved me in the past and will save me in the future is also saving me from making a mess of my life and letting me live my life for him. As Paul writes from prison, "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." When we pray the Lord's Prayer we joyfully say, "Thy will be done." We want the Lord to get real aggressive and save us from making a mess in our lives. We want him to help us by his grace and mercy to shine like stars.

You and I have a lot in common with the stars when you think about it. The stars in the sky had nothing to do with becoming stars. It was the Lord who made them and put them into place. It is also the Lord who has taken you and taken me, and made something of our lives, when we were destined for eternal death and destruction. We say with Paul, "By grace you have been saved..." Like the stars our course of life is not just known, but also planned for us by the Lord. It is the Lord who works in us according to his good pleasure, his good will and his good purpose. The Lord already knows and has planned how your life will shine for him and radiate his glory. Let's hear what Paul says about living our lives for the glory of God.

Shining for God's glory

We hear the chains rattling as he moves his feet. He takes the pen and writes these words to his dear Christian friends in Philippi. "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." How can I shine like a star this coming week? I can do this by living my life without grumbling and without complaining. It is so easy to moan and groan, grumble and complain. We complain about doing the dishes, when we should be happy there was food to be eaten. We complain about cleaning the house when we should be happy to have a house in which to live. We complain about our job when we should be thrilled to even have

a job.

Let me begin a verse of the Bible and then I want you to help me finish it. "O, give thanks unto the Lord... for his mercy endures forever." That is the beginning of Psalm 118. Read the whole psalm and it will show you specifically how you can give thanks to the Lord in every situation of life because his mercy endures forever. It tells you how the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. That is a reference to how Jesus was rejected even though he took our sins with him to the cross. It speaks of how Jesus the rejected stone has become the capstone of an arch, how he was raised from the dead and became the magnificent completed work of your salvation. That is a reason to have a song in our hearts, a spring in our step, and a smile on our face every day.

Oh, please don't get me wrong. I am not suggesting that you shine like stars by putting on a face smile like this "smiley face." I once saw a bumper sticker on a car that said, "I like to step on smiley faces." Perhaps that person had seen one too many fake smiley faces. Remember the words from the musical "Bye Bye Birdie." "Gray skies are gonna clear up, Put on a happy face; Brush off the clouds and cheer up, Put on a happy face. Take off the gloomy mask of tragedy, It's not your style; You'll look so good that you'll be glad Ya' decide to smile!" Paul is not telling us to put on a smile and put on a happy face. He is simply telling us to be who we are in Christ and let other people see how thankful we are for our many blessings in Jesus.

He calls on us to do to be blameless and pure in a corrupt and crooked generation. Obviously we can never reach a level of perfection in this life, but we want to live our lives out of love for the Lord in such a way that people who are still in darkness will not have stones to throw at us. As a Christian you are living in a glass house. There are no curtains and every room is brightly lit with lights. The people at work know you are a Christian because you don't use the bad language they are using. They know that you go to church on Sunday and that you pray before your meals and that you pray for people in need. Everyone is religious in their own way, and eventually they will find out what you believe. Then the hard work begins of living up to what we have in Christ so others will say, "I want that peace and that joy and that forgiveness that you have found in Jesus." We are only pure and blameless before God through Jesus blood that washes us clean, but we want the people living in darkness to see our lives shine like stars. The person at work who is not a Christian only knows the Bible through how you live your life. "You are writing a gospel, a letter each day, by the deeds that you do and the words that you say." Then we will have opportunities to hold out the word of life to them. The message we have in the Bible is one of life, everlasting life, not death. It is a simple message that all of us can share when we shine like stars. "God so loved the world..."

Finally, Paul joyfully says he is ready to let his life shine for the Lord by giving himself to death for the sake of Christ. "Even if I am poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you." Pagans would offer a sacrifice to their gods and then pour a libation or drink offering to their gods. Paul is ready to have his life poured out not for some heathen god, but for the Lord. As he said earlier in this letter, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." I am holding a flashlight that does not shine brightly on the ceiling of this building. But in the dark, you will see the light shining brightly.

Tomorrow is another day for you to let your light shine in the darkness of the world that surrounds you. May the Lord give you great joy as you shine like stars. Amen.