



Shine On Phil 2:12-18

One of the things that is most noticeable these cold clear winter evenings is the mass of stars in the sky. When we lived in Swaffham, there were far fewer street lights and the stars in the sky could be quite stunning. It's surprising how in the darkness of night, the brightness of the stars show the splendour of God's universe. There was a program about telescopes the other week and we were shown how the latest instruments can probe deep into the wonders of the universe. But you get that sense of grandeur on a clear dark night.

In a metaphorical sense, the world we live in has much darkness – how does the goodness and splendour of God cut through that? You may have already guessed that one!

In the past couple of weeks we see Paul was addressing a problem in the church at Philippi. They were a good church, but unfortunately there was a humility problem. He was pleased with them, but he wanted them to make his joy complete by having a single mind, be humble and look out for one another. He encouraged them to have the attitude of Christ and we saw that attitude was one of humility and submission to the Father, placing our needs before His.

As a result God has exalted Jesus to the highest place because of what He has achieved because of His humility. Being in an exalted place means that one day people will see Jesus and recognise his position and confess Jesus as Lord. He is enthroned in His splendour because of His humility and obedience.

This passage this evening reflects what has gone before. Just as Jesus is high and lifted up, Paul calls on this church at Philippi to shine like stars – why? *You must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky, 16 as you offer them the message of life.* So that their lives might show that the message of life, the message of Jesus is true. In effect people would see the exalted Jesus in them – reword. God the Father has exalted Jesus to the highest place and given Him the name above all names – now we are called to be the shining stars that exalt Jesus to our generation. We should be the ones that shine in the world's darkness showing the splendour of God. Wow! What a responsibility!

So when Paul asks the Christians at Philippi to have the same attitude as Jesus and backs it with the Christ Hymn, he stresses the second theme of the hymn and that is obedience. Jesus wasn't just humble; He was obedient to death – even death on a cross. Paul uses this notion of obedience to remind them of his authority as an apostle over the church at Philippi and says it is even more important that you obey me now while I am away from you.

Now for an aside. It's a bold leader that says "obey me". To be able to do that you need to be two things; firstly someone who has earned the confidence of the church that you have anointing and authority of God and secondly that his life and witness reflected what he was teaching. That's a tall order, but that's what God expects of those He calls and anoints for leadership. It should make any leader – like me- reflect really hard on my position and my lifestyle. It also stresses the importance of the church to think spiritually about who they choose as leaders (at any level). It's not just a matter of ability and qualifications, but it's a matter of discerning whether the leader is anointed by God for the task He is calling the person to do, but that the person demonstrates integrity in who they are.

I say this because we are a church with leaders - a pastor, elders and deacons. There are people responsible to lead in ministries throughout the church. This is God's church and there are always two dangers if we forget these basic principles. The first will be that we will choose people on the basis of "he's a jolly good chap; she's a really nice lady" rather than "where's God leading here"? If you have to look too hard for the anointing of God (or even integrity for that matter) in someone, then

maybe you're looking too hard. I remember one church I was associated with that all the leaders always seemed to have degrees and doctorates. Someone may have all the learning on earth, but it may not give them an ounce of common sense (I speak of one such) and it does not confer on them any spirituality at all. The other problem is that people get into leadership because no-one else is prepared to do it. Willingness is not a mark of spirituality either.

Paul was anointed of God, a man of integrity who walked in the Spirit. OK, he had his problems and his weaknesses too! All leaders do. But who he was in Christ enabled him to say boldly "obey me".

That was an aside. If the people were supposed to be obeying as Christ did, what obedience did Paul require of them.

1. Complete your Salvation

Keep on working with fear and trembling to complete your salvation, 13 because God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose. I think the NIV gives us the better sense here: *continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.* I thought we were already saved through faith in Christ you may say. Yes. Paul doesn't say work at your salvation, he says work it out. We are but in the NT there are the senses of saved, being saved and will be saved. We are saved now, but we haven't yet completed our journey though this world – we are in the process of salvation. One day we shall be in the Lord's presence throughout eternity – we will be saved. It's rather like the picture of the lifeguard I gave you the other week. We are saved once we grab on to him, but we need to hold on to him until we reach the shore and are safe on dry land.

So Paul doesn't say work at but work out. We're saved, so let's work out the implications of that as we go through our lives in Him. The Message gives the idea better:

12-13 What I'm getting at, friends, is that you should simply keep on doing what you've done from the beginning. When I was living among you, you lived in responsive obedience. Now that I'm separated from you, keep it up. Better yet, redouble your efforts. Be energetic in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God. That energy is God's energy, an energy deep within you, God himself willing and working at what will give him the most pleasure.

As God's people we are a work in progress. When we decided to follow Jesus we set ourselves on a road to follow Jesus – to trust, to follow, to love like Jesus and to obey Him. This is serious business. In the words of Mastermind "I've started, so I've finished."

2. Shine like Stars

14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may be innocent and pure as God's perfect children, who live in a world of corrupt and sinful people. You must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky, 16 as you offer them the message of life. If you do so, I shall have reason to be proud of you on the Day of Christ, because it will show that all my effort and work have not been wasted.

We looked at this idea this morning. Faith should automatically make us shine like stars but so often we don't. Part of working out our salvation with fear and trembling is to realise that we do need to shine like stars. How we live, how we speak, how we deal with the issues of life, how the presence of God is manifested in our lives makes the difference with people. We shine as stars.

Paul focuses on one area of relationship that was clearly an issue that was affecting their ministry – complaining and arguing.

An older woman walked into a department store one day and was surprised when a band began to play and an executive pinned an orchid on her dress and handed her a crisp \$100 bill. She didn't know it but she was the store's one millionth customer. Television cameras zoomed in and a reporter started interviewing her. The first question she was asked was this: "Tell me, just what did you come here for today?" The lady hesitated for a moment and then answered sheepishly, "I was on my way to the Complaint Department." Brian Bill

We live in a world of complaints and arguments – you can't avoid them anywhere. What makes soaps so popular? Is it the nice scenery? Is it the joy of living in London's East End! Is it a celebration of life in Manchester? Of course not! These things run on conflict and strife and they are

a commentary on the worst parts of life.

We are again fortunate as a church as we are not characterised by arguing and moaning people. It makes this sermon easy and it probably would have more effect here than elsewhere. Because when we're not moaning and complaining, we can see more easily how destructive these things are. Complaining churches are unhappy churches – and if not dealt with fall apart rapidly. They get a reputation in the community as unhappy places. They don't shine as stars because they are not appealing places for people to be part of. Let's resist the temptation of going down that road.

We've got to shine out like stars in the blackness of night. We've got to be that difference and make that difference. Remember from this morning – our actions must match the noble words of faith we speak – or people will perceive it rightly or wrongly as counterfeit.

3. Share your Joy

17 Perhaps my life's blood is to be poured out like an offering on the sacrifice that your faith offers to God. If that is so, I am glad and share my joy with you all. 18 In the same way, you too must be glad and share your joy with me.

Paul calls on them to share their joy. Shining like stars isn't just about doing, but it's about sharing the joy that we have in Christ even when times are difficult as it was for Paul and even the Philippians.

Today has been all about the real-ness of our faith. If it's real, then our lives should show it in how we behave. If our response to God is joy – then it's joy that we should show. It should be infections through the smile on our face, the enthusiasm of our voice and the encouragement of our words. Paul needed them to encourage him as he contemplated his trial. He set that example his way and he needed them to share theirs with him.

It's important and vital that we encourage one another with the blessings that God is pouring on us. Why? Because as we see what God is doing amongst us, it confirms to us the real-ness of our faith and it encourages us to want to serve and honour Him more faithfully.

But there's more to these verses than this. In the NIV Paul says this of himself in verse 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.* These were people feeling sad that Paul might die (Paul uses the term drink offering here – a libation – an offering to God. *"And Jacob set up a Pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a Pillar of Stone; and he poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it".* (Genesis 35:14). Isaiah uses libation as a metaphor when describing the end of the Suffering Servant figure who: "poured out his life unto death". (53:12). This is a picture of Jesus of course.

The drink offering involved the pouring away of good wine before God – an offering to Him. Why? As a means of placing the best of what we have at His feet as worship. Someone has said this and I can't work out who.

"I think there is a major point here: No matter what seems pragmatically best, our lives being poured out in worshipful service and praise of Jesus is the BEST and ONLY GOOD use of our lives. Paul echoes that idea in Philippians 2:17, "If I am being poured out like a drink offering [...] I am glad and rejoice."

Don't be sad and don't consider my life wasted. It's just worship to God just as their faithfulness has been service to God. Remember he said *"for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

The bottom line is, we are called as the people to shine as stars in the blackness of the world and we do that in obedience to Jesus – whatever it costs, whatever it takes. Then we start to see the difference.