

Shine

Philippians 2:12-18

Introduction

Mark Twain once wrote:

*Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example.
(Mark Twain)*

We rightfully celebrate those “good examples” around us, but you have to agree ... trying to live up to that example gets to be pretty annoying at times. In fact, we often teach others that they shouldn't point to those good examples too often.

- As parents we are warned NOT to compare our children with each other.
- Teachers get the same counsel about comparing their students.

We meet one of those good examples in the paragraphs immediately preceding today's reading from Philippians 2, none other than Jesus Christ Himself. There the Apostle Paul presents Jesus as the great example for our faith. Jesus, Paul says:

- Consistently put others before Himself
- He demonstrated incredible humility
- He was perfectly obedient to the point of dying on the cross.

As Christians, we know that is our goal. We strive for that standard, but because we are humans, we fail. We know that will happen. Paul knows that will happen. But Paul doesn't let us off the hook; instead he challenges us:

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 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 as you hold firmly to the word of life. (Philippians 2:14-16a)

Do you hear the challenge? We are called to SHINE!

#1: WE ARE TO SHINE LIKE STARS IN THE SKY

Verse 15:

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky... (Philippians 2:15)

One night President Abraham Lincoln invited a young man to take a walk with him along a country road. As they walked, Lincoln lifted his eyes to the heavens. It was one of those beautifully clear nights when the sky was full of stars. The young man later reported that Lincoln's words that night left a lasting impression on him. Here's what Lincoln said:

"I never behold (the stars) that I don't feel I am looking into the face of God. A man might look upon the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look into the heavens and say there is no God."

His words echo Psalm 19:

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
(Psalm 19:1)*

Lives that "shine like stars in the sky" are lives that point people to the God of the universe, the God who created it all. They show His glory. They proclaim His work.

The whole life of Jesus our Good Example did that. He pointed people to His Heavenly Father. In that wonderful passage of Scripture where Jesus makes it clear that He is the ONLY way to get to heaven, He adds this point:

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:9)

By looking at Jesus people could see God. Dare we strive to live that way ourselves? If we are shining like stars in the sky, won't the result be that people see God in us?

In a couple of weeks, we will have a baptism here. In that service, Matt Rugh, our Director of Youth and Children's Ministries, will light a candle and say to the baby:

Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

When a life shines, people see God.

#2: WE ARE TO SHINE IN A TROUBLED WORLD

When verse 15 was read a few moments ago, these were the words you heard:

*Then you will shine among **them** like stars in the sky... (Philippians 2:15)*

Who is "them?" Back up to the previous sentence where we are challenged to be:

*... children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.
(Philippians 2:15)*

That's the "them." The warped and crooked generation. Another translation phrases it as "the squalid and polluted society." Them is the them!

Warped, crooked, squalid, polluted. Yeah, those seem to be accurate adjectives for our world today. Wouldn't you agree? We are not just to shine like stars in the sky. We are to shine "among them."

When Jesus walked on the earth, He was often criticized for hanging out with the warped, the crooked, the squalid, the polluted. Shame on Him!, they said. If He was really the Messiah, He would know better than to associate with people like that.

We cannot **shine** among them unless we **are** among them. The people of God have never been called to hang out in the sanitized sanctuary. We are called to shine among the warped, crooked, squalid and polluted. We are called to shine in places of darkness. That's where lights belong. In dark places.

#3: WE ARE TO SHINE BY HOLD FIRMLY THE WORD OF LIFE

This takes us to verse 16: *(Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky)*

... as you hold firmly to the word of life. (Philippians 2:16)

Every once in a while my hands will touch a special dish. And when they do, I will hear Karen say something like this: "This is my great grandmother's dish." Do you need me to translate that for you? She is telling me, "Don't you dare break that." My pulse rate quickens. My grip tightens. I pay great attention to the obstacles that might be in my way. I most certainly handle it with care. You might say, I hold firmly to great grandma's dish.

God's Word should be treated the same way. We don't our grip on God's Word because the warped and crooked world around us pressures us to do so. No, in such places our grip tightens, even if our pulse rate is increasing. The warped and crooked need to know there is such a thing as truth, and that there are people who are still committed to living it.

John McArthur, a well-known current pastor and author, writes this:

In virtually every era of church history there have been people in the church who are convinced that the best way to win the world is by catering to worldly tastes. Such an approach has always been to the detriment of the gospel message. The only times the church has made any significant impact on the world are when the people of God have stood firm, refused to compromise, and boldly proclaimed the truth despite the world's hostility. When Christians have shrunk away from the task of confronting popular worldly delusions with unpopular biblical truths, the church has invariably lost influence and impotently blended into the world. Both Scripture and history attest to that fact. (John McArthur)

When Christians hold firm, when they resolutely stick to the mission of Jesus, it is in those moments their lights shine like stars in the sky, for it is in those moments we are most like our Great Example, Jesus. He was pressured to take the easy way at the beginning of His ministry. Satan's temptations were powerful, but Jesus always responded with the words of Scripture. He had a firm grip on what the Scriptures said.

APPLICATION

So that's what the text means. But how do we make that happen, in our lives and in our congregation. Our focus this month has been wrapped around the theme "Open My Eyes, Lord." We want to see what God is doing in our midst. We want to know where God is leading us. You are about to make commitments of your finances and your time, so it is most appropriate for you to consider whether those are worthy investments.

For the last year I have been discerning God's direction for our congregation. What does God have in mind for us? How are we to shine like stars in the sky? As we conclude this service I invite to join me in a spirit of expectancy for the next few minutes as we ask God to open our eyes.

From my office window I have a wonderful view of the sidewalk that goes between the south edge of our parking lot and the neighborhoods that are built on the other end. The sidewalk was installed three years as an Eagle Scout project. It has become a symbol for me of God's vision for this congregation. Open my eyes, Lord is my daily prayer.

Sidewalks are invitations, calling those on one end to come. And they do. Skate boarders, bike riders, walkers and those on their way to the stores on Bechtle Avenue. God, what do you want us to see with regard to all of that unused land? Is there a walking path, a playground, youth soccer fields? Maybe a wedding chapel? A shelter house? Resources that welcome families to our property! Open my eyes, Lord.

Inside the walls of that church these families see is a beautiful sanctuary, a place filled with praise and prayer and the proclamation of God's word. It's a welcoming place. God, what do we need to see in order for these pews to be filled with people who don't know you yet? Open my eyes, Lord.

The wings offer places of ministry to youth and children, places where they can hear of a new way of living, a way different from the warped and crooked ways they normally see. How can we reach them? Open my eyes, Lord!

This is a place with an overflowing love for people. We care about what is happening to them, and we honestly seek ways to help. Are we doing all we can, Lord? Open my eyes.

The main staff hallway has pictures of every former pastor of this congregation. We have been blessed by their leadership. By contrast the number of people who have gone from this congregation to become pastors or missionaries is few, despite more than a 100 year history. What would it take, Lord, to fill the blank wall with dozens and dozens of pictures of those who gone from here to serve you in other places. Open my eyes, Lord.

The traffic on a sidewalk goes two ways. In toward the property, and out into the mission field. Where are you calling us to go, Lord? Open my eyes.

The harvest is plentiful. Last month a team of missionaries used our building as their home base for two weeks. From here they went out every day to share the good news of Jesus. While here they talked with 165 people about matters of faith, 12 of whom made a profession of faith. How do we make a similar impact? Open my eyes, Lord.

Will it be through our involvement in area outreach ministries? We are well known and well loved in the outreach community. How do we increase our impact through these and other similar organizations? Open my eyes, Lord.

Will our impact be felt in our colleges and local schools? How do we gain a presence on the Wittenberg campus? How do we better minister to the children in our elementary schools – children who live right here in our neighborhoods? Open my eyes, Lord!

All around us churches are closing. What resources do we have that might reinvigorate these discouraged and dying congregations? How might we be used by you Lord to multiply our ministry through restart and new start congregations? Open my eyes, Lord!

In a matter of moments, you will be invited to share with God what the degree to which you will be invested in His vision for this congregation. You will tell Him how you will serve with your Time and Talent, and how you will give from the resources He has graciously given to you. God has a great plan in mind for this congregation. He hasn't called us to merely exist. He called us to shine.

Open our eyes, Lord! We want to see Jesus!

Amen.