

Text: Philippians 2:14-16 (Pew Bible, pg.1162)

Title: “Piercing the Darkness”

INTRODUCTION

Let’s open our Bibles this morning to Philippians 2:14-16. My series is entitled “Holy Habits” and we’re talking about the attributes of passionate followers of Jesus Christ. Our church’s mission, along with every other NT church, is to make disciples. Jesus said, “Go and make disciples.” So to make disciples we have to go with the Gospel. And that is one of our priorities this year. To go to as many places as we can possibly go to share the Gospel with as many people as we possibly can. For some of us that will mean we will go with the Gospel to other places in the US and around the world one the many short-term mission trips we have planned. And for all us it should mean going with the Gospel by inviting our non-believing friends and loved ones to events like the men’s Call of the Wild Dinner, or the Ladies Retreat, both coming up this month. God’s Word teaches us that this is to what we are to be about. Now follow along as I read our text.

We live our lives as followers of Jesus Christ in what Paul calls here in v.15 “a crooked and depraved generation.” If that was true 2000 years ago, it is certainly true now.

GRAMMY WEDDING PHOTO

ILLUSTRATION –I didn’t watch the Grammy Awards last Sunday night, but I’ve seen snippets from news sources of what went on, which is certainly no surprise to us. I understand that the entertainment industry doesn’t totally reflect our culture, but it often gives us a glimpse into the darkness ... the crookedness and depravity ... that lurks just beneath the surface. At one point in the Grammy’s last Sunday night the stage was made to look like a huge church. About thirty couples gay and straight paraded into the theater where they lined up and a mass wedding took place, officiated by none other than Queen Latifah, a hip-hop rap artist, talk show host and radical feminist. The “wedding” music was the song “Same Love,” which has become the anthem for same sex marriage advocates.

Philippians 2:15 - 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

The fact is that the human situation, because of our sin, will always be described, as Paul does here in Philippians 2:15, as a crooked and depraved generation. It was true then, and it is true now. “Crooked” means perverse and wicked ... turning away from the truth. “Depraved” is a stronger word that means “twisted.” In other words, no matter what the country or the culture, the human situation is messed up.

Now obviously God is completely aware of what’s going on in any generation. But what does He do about it?

- Some would say He does nothing; in fact, He just doesn’t care. He isn’t involved directly in human affairs and He’s not concerned one way or the other. Well, that certainly does not square with the truth of the Bible.

- Others say that God does care but He's not interested in changing anything. He's going to let everything deteriorate until one day He'll come, judge the world and condemn sinners. That will be the end of it. So His people should just retreat to their bunkers and try to hold out until Jesus comes. But that doesn't square with what the Bible teaches.
- Others say that God just leaves it to us to fix our dark, messed up world. So as humans we think we think we can fix all the problems this world has; we have all the answers. We can educate the darkness out of people. Or we can improve the environment that people live in, and that will eradicate all that's wrong with the human situation.

But the Bible reveals to us a different perspective. God sees what's going on. He cares about the mess we are in. He knows we cannot fix it ourselves. Yes, He is a holy God who must punish sin, but He is also a loving God who desires to redeem and deliver people, and the world in which they live. And the way He chose to do that was radical. He chose to send His Son Jesus Christ into this crooked and depraved world to redeem all who would trust in Him. He accomplished everything on the Cross of Calvary necessary to deliver us from this sinful life. And this is called the Gospel, or the Good News. And God has chosen to demonstrate this Good News and to deliver this Good News in the darkness of this crooked and depraved generation ... through the lives of His people, passionate followers of Jesus Christ, who pierce the darkness by sharing the light and love of Jesus Christ.

In our Blueprint for Spiritual Formation we state:

PASSIONATE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST ... SHARE JESUS CHRIST WITH OTHERS

So the Bible here shows us how we are to pierce the darkness. We are to...

1. DEMONSTRATE THE GOOD NEWS (Philippians 2:14-15)

Now this all starts back in vv.12-13:

Philippians 2:12b - Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

Philippians 2:13 - for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

DNOW – “INSIDE OUT”

God has worked His salvation in us through Jesus Christ. He is work in us to will and to act according to His good purpose. Now the next verse may shock us.

Philippians 2:14 - Do everything without complaining or arguing,

Note: This is amazing to me. When the Bible talks about us working out our salvation ... when it talks about God work in us to will and to act according to His good purpose for our life ... of all the things God could have said here, He chose this issue. He could have said, “Read your Bible ... pray

... live a moral life ... and any number of habits that we might call “the biggies.” Rather, the very first thing that is mentioned is to “do everything without complaining and arguing.”

Now we know this was an ongoing problem in the church in Philippi that threatened their fellowship and their witness for Christ. But it’s a problem in the lives of many believers today, in families and in churches.

“Do *everything* without complaining (grumbling) and arguing” ... there’s nothing that is exempted from this. We so often act like, “Oh, God didn’t really mean me when He was talking about this. Oh yeah, I know that’s what it says, but it really doesn’t apply to me, or God really didn’t mean that when He said it.” And God might well say to us today, “What part of “do everything without complaining and arguing” do you not understand?”

Someone put it this way: You can't be godly and grumpy.

Now one reason that we are to do everything without grumbling and arguing is that it demonstrates our faith in God. We believe that God is sovereign in all things, even those circumstances when we are put out or inconvenienced or disappointed. When we complain and argue we are saying to God and those around us that we don’t think God is doing a very good job of taking care of things in our lives. That’s really what we’re saying when we grumble and complain.

Another reason that we are to do everything without grumbling and arguing is that when we act that way it hurts our witness.

ILLUSTRATION – In his book *In the Eye of the Storm* Max Lucado tells of one Spring Break when his dad took Max and a friend named Mark fishing. They were going to be fishing in a boat on a beautiful lake and staying in the family camper trailer. That’s a boy’s dream. They were so excited as they prepared for the trip; they could hardly wait. Here’s how Max tells the story:

”Days passed like cold molasses. Finally spring break arrived. We loaded our camper and set out for the lake. We arrived late at night, unfolded the camper, and went to bed – dreaming of tomorrow’s day in the sun. But, during the night, an unseasonable strong norther blew in. It got cold fast! The wind was so strong that we could barely open the camper door the next morning. The sky was gray. The lake was a mountain of white-topped waves. There was no way we could fish in that weather. “No problem,” we said. “We’ll spend the day in the camper. After all, we have Monopoly. We have Reader’s Digest. We all know a few jokes. It’s not what we came to do, but we’ll make the best of it and fish tomorrow.” So, huddled in the camper with a Coleman stove and a Monopoly board, we three fishermen passed the day – indoors.

“The hours passed slowly, but they did pass. Night finally came, and we crawled into the sleeping bags dreaming of angling. Were we in for a surprise? The next morning it wasn’t the wind that made the door hard to open, it was the ice! We tried to be cheerful. “No problem,” we mumbled. “We can play Monopoly...again. We can reread the stories in Reader’s Digest. And surely we know another joke or two.”

“But as courageous as we tried to be, it was obvious that some of the gray had left the sky and entered into our camper. I began to notice a few things I hadn’t seen before. I noticed that Mark had a few personality flaws. He was a bit too cocky about his opinions. He was easily irritated and constantly edgy. He couldn’t take any constructive criticism. Even though his socks did stink, he didn’t think it was my business to tell him. “Just looking out for the best interest of my dad’s camper,” I defended, expecting Dad to come to my aid. But Dad just sat over in the corner, reading. Humph, I thought, where is he when I need him? And then, I began to see Dad in a different light. When I mentioned to him the eggs were soggy and the toast was burnt, he invited me to try my hand at the portable stove. Touchy, touchy, I said to myself. Nothing like being cooped up in a camper with someone to help you see his real nature.

“It was a long day. It was a long, cold night. When we awoke the next morning to the sound of sleet slapping the canvas, we didn’t even pretend to be cheerful. We were flat-out grumpy. Mark became more of a jerk with each passing moment; I wondered what spell of ignorance I must have been in when I invited him. Dad couldn’t do anything right; I wondered how someone so irritable could have such an even-tempered son. We sat in misery the whole day, our fishing equipment still unpacked.

“The next day was even colder. “We’re going home” were my father’s first words. No one objected.

“I learned a hard lesson that week. Not about fishing, but about people. When those who are called to fish don’t fish, they fight. When energy intended to be used outside is used inside, the result is explosive. Instead of casting nets, we cast stones. Instead of extending helping hands, we point accusing fingers. Instead of being fishers of the lost, we become critics of the saved. Rather than helping the hurting, we hurt the helpers. The result? Church scrooges. “Bah humbug” spirituality. Beady eyes searching for warts on others while ignoring the warts on the nose below. Crooked fingers that bypass strengths and point out weaknesses. Split churches. Poor testimonies. Broken hearts. Legalistic wars. And, sadly, poor go unfed, confused go uncounseled, and lost go unreached.

“When those who are called to fish don’t fish, they fight. But note the other side of the fish tale:
When those who are called to fish, fish—they flourish!”

And again, we do this because God has a plan for us to work out our salvation ... to act according to His good purpose for our lives. And that “good purpose” is explained in...

Philippians 2:15 - 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

The words “may become” signal to us that God expects us to grow up as followers of Jesus. We’ve been talking about that in this series of messages called “Holy Habits.” We are to become more and more like Jesus.

Paul spells it out for us here. We are to become:

- **BLAMELESS** – That’s the word Paul uses in v.15. Now this doesn’t mean that we are sinlessly perfect. It means that we live in such a way that others have no reason to point a finger of accusation at us that we are not living up to our profession of faith in Christ.
- **SPOTLESS** – That’s the meaning of the word “pure” (v.15) The word means to be undiluted, unadulterated. There is no mixture of evil in our lives.
- **FAULTLESS** – We are to be “without fault” (v.15). Again we’re not talking about sinless perfection. It does mean that we are growing in Christlikeness in every area of our lives.

Why? When we live this way we really show we are “children of God.” Children bear a resemblance to their father. This is what we are to become. We will never arrive until we get to heaven, but we are to strive to demonstrate the Gospel is at work in our lives by living in this way.

And as we do we “shine like stars in the universe.” Have you ever been out in the country, maybe in the mountains on a crystal clear night? You’re away from the city where there is something called “light pollution.” It’s really dark, but against the backdrop of that darkness the moon and the stars are absolutely brilliant. That’s the picture the Bible paints of our lives as followers of Jesus, piercing the darkness in this messed up world.

There are many images in the Bible of the Christian life. One of the most powerful ones is the image of light shining into darkness. It starts with who Jesus is:

John 8:12 - “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

And Jesus then calls us to experience His light in our lives and to express that light through our lives.

Ephesians 5:8 - For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

So there is something here about the way we are to demonstrate the Good News. But there’s also something here about the way we are to...

2. DELIVER THE GOOD NEWS (Philippians 2:16)

It says that you shine like stars in the universe...

Philippians 2:16 - as you hold out the word of life...

Now the word of life is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is not just for preachers and evangelists; this is for every believer. And the way Paul phrases this it means “as you keep on holding out the word of life.” It is a holy habit.

ILLUSTRATION: I thought about this the other day when I was at the food court at the mall. Out in front of the Chinese food place there was a girl with a tray and she was holding out a sample of the food they served. Out in front of the Mexican food place there was a guy with a tray holding out a sample of the food they served. Now I was tempted just to not buy anything and just circle around and take stuff off their trays until I was full. But I thought that might be a bit obvious.

Now to hold out the word of life (the Gospel) means a couple of things:

- **Hold fast to the Gospel** – We can trust the Gospel. Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ because it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.”
- **Hold forth the Gospel** – We hold it forth when we speak it to others. We cannot get around this. It isn’t enough just to live our lives without telling others about the One who has made the difference in our lives.

If you are not holding it fast you will not hold it out. And if you don’t hold it out it must mean you don’t hold it fast.

How do we go about doing this? Easy! Treat people the way Jesus treated people. And how did Jesus treat people?

- **SEEK A RELATIONSHIP** – Many people who don’t have a relationship with Christ feel that believers think they’re superior. Lose the attitude. We’re not told to hide from the darkness but to penetrate the darkness. Invite them into your world. Jesus spent time with those that “religious” people shunned. He was a friend to “sinners.”
- **SHOW RESPECT** – They are not a project; they’re a person. One of the best ways to show respect to someone is to listen to them. As you invite them to events here at church, be as sensitive as you can about how they might perceive things.
- **SPEAK THE TRUTH** – Sooner or later, God will open the door for you to hold out the word of life ... the Gospel. You need to be ready for this. This means we need to know the Gospel well enough to share it with other people. Tell the story of Christ loved you and changed you.

CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATION – This week I read an interview with Seattle Seahawks long-snapper Clint Gresham. Clint is a former TCU Horned Frog, but more importantly he’s a strong believer. He’s playing in the Super Bowl tonight against the Denver Broncos, and he’s using that as a platform to share his faith, which he says is everything to him. He shared this testimony: “I remember being alone and empty and full of all kinds of junk in my heart, and God came in and cleaned me up and He gave me better love. I just want to tell as many people about that as I can.”

That's what it means to...

Philippians 2:15-16a - Become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life...