

Shine Like Stars – Philippians 2:12-18

By: Dean Donaldson

Melville Junction Church, 19 April 2009

- Elections next week, but instead of being excited, I find myself being sucked into the negative conversations with people.
- We make jokes and laugh at some of the ridiculous advertising campaigns and or the politicians.
- What else can we do, we see no hope for the outcome of these elections because we are focused on the tangible reality that is our life here in JHB 3 days before a controversial election.
- I find that when I am looking for a party to vote for, I am trying to choose the best of a poor selection.
- In fact, 1 party in particular says that we should vote for them because they are the best alternative.
- No one is inspiring, I look to our leadership and no one is inspiring me to follow them.
- Then I think about the world around me in general and I see very little in people that is worth following.
- Who has a boss that truly inspires you, in every aspect of life? We see glimpses of inspiration in certain areas of people but not often in the area of character.
- That Nandos advert about change highlights what I am talking about...
- We laugh at it because it is a sad reality.
- But what has this got to do with our 3rd value about building authentic relationships...

- We believe in the friendship that Jesus modelled; friendship where we empower one another to fulfil our destiny in God. We will pursue authentic, honest relationships, both with fellow believers and with the community, which allow each of us to discover and explore God. We will embrace each other unconditionally and carry each other's burdens, even when it costs. We will love each other enough to be vulnerable, speaking the truth in love and growing through conflict. We will pursue friendship before defining function.

- The week before Easter, Paul started teaching into this value and he took us to Philippians 2.
- He was showing us that the essence of Christian relationships is sacrifice, as Jesus humble himself to death on the cross we are to do the same by putting others needs ahead of our own. Making sacrifices for each other.

³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

- I want to build onto this by including how and why we build these relationships both inside and outside of the church.
- I want us to continue with this Philippians passage where Paul ended off last time.

Philippians 2:12-18

Shining as Stars

¹²Therefore, 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, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

¹⁴Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵so 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 ¹⁶as 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. ¹⁷But 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. ¹⁸So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

- Paul (The Apostle) is writing this letter back to the church at Philippi that he planted (Acts 16) He is writing to them from prison to address disunity and quarrelling that has come into the church. Life in Philippi is tough for Christians at this time; they are being persecuted and have lost hope or focus. They start fighting with each other, they start living in a way that reflects the world around them.

In this passage though, Paul is essentially showing them that they should not be reflecting the world around them, they should be a contrast. That contrast comes through what Jesus has done. (Theme)

- The contrast does not come from anything that we in our own abilities can achieve.
- Ph 2:12 starts with “Therefore”:-
- Because Christ was obedient to death, he has been exalted to the highest place and we with Him.
- Because Jesus did this for us we are encouraged in this passage to be obedient to him.
- The contrast starts here. God’s character is shown here as it is throughout the bible.
- Because I brought you out of Egypt – obey these laws. Because I have redeemed you, obey me.
- The world operates on the “work hard and you will get paid system” not the “here is your money now work for it system”
- Paul is telling the Philippian church here that their salvation is given up front through Jesus so in obedience to this they should continue to work it out.

1. They need to work hard at exploring, enjoying and understanding this gift of salvation through the work that God is doing in us.

...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

- They have been **given the gift** of salvation, it’s theirs but to truly live in the **full benefit** of what this salvation means to them they need to work it out (**not work at it**).
- They don’t need to do it alone though **because God is at work** in them, their work is to allowing him to shape and mould them.
- The language here refers to you plural (the church at Philippi), in community.
- There also seems to be a contradiction here, we need to work out our salvation but it is God doing the work? (read it again)
- What he is saying here is not a contradiction but more like both and.
- It might be helpful to look at it like this.
- The words that Paul is using here keep referring us back to the exodus, God leading the nation of Israel out of Egypt.

- It would be like crossing the Red sea, God parted the sea but the Israelites had to walk through. God is opening the way, showing us where to go but we have to pick up our feet and go. It's an active process.
- When Joshua (my son) was 1 year old I bought him this present, a set of cool building blocks. On his birthday though, he was excited about this pretty present but once it was opened he only played with the paper and ignored the rest of the gift.
- When he was 2 years old though, he came back to this gift and started playing with it, banging them together, throwing them around and using it as a cell phone.
- Now that he is 3 years old though, he builds things out of the blocks like cars, cranes & guns.
- Over these 3 years though, I have been showing, teaching and helping him to fully enjoy his gift and his friends have been influencing what he builds (guns).
- We need to understand this, it is key to how we build authentic relationships with our community.
- We firstly understand that this gift has been given, Jesus gave it through His death and resurrection. It is the start of the journey.
- How we live out the rest of the journey though is the important bit. To fully live we need to go where God is leading us, through these walls of water to the promise land.
- Getting to the promise land (new heaven & new earth) is more about our journey than my journey.
- So our relationships that are selfless, humble and serving of others, with God at the centre is how we work out our salvation.
- It is this relationship that stands out in direct contrast to the world. The world tells us that it is about me, my life, my wants and my salvation.
- We do this in fear and trembling because it is important to God the essence of why we gather as church.
- When we get it right, people in our communities see it and want it. It brings light into a dark place.

- When I am despondent about the elections, someone comes along side me and shows me that there is something better. I am looking for hope in our politicians but the only real hope comes from God.

¹⁴Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ¹⁶as you hold out the word of life

2. People around us are scared, lost and discouraged. The only real change that can happen is Jesus. Jesus (word of life) is the light that shines through us in an ungodly world. If we don't believe that, then we have nothing contrasting to offer the world.
 - If we are not shining like stars, then we are no different to the world around us and thus have no basis for forming authentic relationships.
 - This sentence is specifically referring to the Israelites grumbling and complaining in the dessert after God had freed them from slavery.
 - They have forgotten what God has done, thus see no hope for what God is doing.
 - Rob Bell tells a story about two Israelites walking across the red sea. The one complains to the other that his sandals are full of mud, and the other is complaining about mud between his toes. They are so focused on the mud that they do not look up and see the incredible walls of water being held up on either side of them.
 - People have said to me that they don't really want to tell others about Jesus because life as they know it has been more challenging since they became a Christian.
 - They see people around them and feel that this person lives well. The thing that I have to offer them is worse than what they currently have. I have nothing better to offer.
 - We are so focused on the mud between our toes that we no longer seeing the walls of water on either side of us.
 - In our grumbling and complaining, we have forgotten what Jesus has done for us.
 - We have forgotten that the God we serve is awesome.
 - In our forgetfulness we start to reflect the fears and worries of people around us instead of bringing hope, truth and life.

- So when I get sucked into complaining and grumbling about our election candidates, I am essentially saying that the God I believe in is not sovereign. He is not mighty to save.
- I forget, and in my forgetfulness I kill peoples hope. People long to believe in something bigger than themselves and these issues. In my forgetfulness though, I can't see past the mud between my toes to point people towards a saving God.
 - When I grumble about corruption or crime – I forget
 - When I complain about money, work or traffic – I forget
 - The car, wife, house or clothes that I don't have – I forget.
- What this is saying is don't forget, remember. Remember what Jesus has done in everything.
- When we remember, we shine like stars.
- We bring life where there is death and give hope to the hopeless.
- When we remember, we have something unique and authentic to offer people around us.
- Hold out the word of life in all that you do and people will be drawn to it.

...in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. ¹⁷But 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. ¹⁸So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

3. We are running a marathon that started with Jesus death and resurrection and finishes with His return. At times things will go well but at other times things will be difficult but in the good times and in the difficult times, we should be those who continue to rejoice in the Lord.
 - It is all about the marathon or the journey. God created us to be in relationship with Him. This marathon we are running is that relationship. So in the difficult times as well as the good times, if we are focused on the relationship we will see the walls of water on either side of us instead of the mud between our toes.
 - It is this marathon, this relationship with God that we are offering our communities.
 - A lifelong relationship with God and each other.
 - We run this race together and we help each other towards get to the finish line.

- The world will tell us that we run the race to win by whatever means.
- But we bring a contrast to that, how we run this race counts.
- The amount of people that finish the race counts.
- It's not about me and my race, it's about we and our relationship with God.
- So when I think about the elections with this in mind, I am encouraged.
- Worrying about the outcome is far less important than how we respond to God through the process and after the process.
- Worrying and complaining changes nothing it makes us forget who God is and what He has done for us.
- We stop shining like stars in the universe.
- We rob ourselves and our community of the hope that has been and that is still to come.