

Series: "Valuable Wisdom for a Church on the 'Move'"

Sermon: "Shine"

Text: *Philippians 2:12-18*

RGGJR/FBCCS/10-11-20 **UNEDITED**

- Like some of the rest of you, we have a lamppost in our front yard. Beth has labeled it the "lamppost from Narnia." When the Christmas wreath is hung on it and there is a bit of snow on the wreath, it does look a bit like that.
- Unlike the gas light in the Narnia post, ours is electric. A few years ago, I found a LED bulb that glowed with the temperature—or color, if like me you can't keep the "degrees" Kelvin measurements straight—it glowed with more of the color of a gaslight than the color of a searchlight.
- A couple of weeks ago, I noticed that when I lit our Narnia lamp by flipping the switch it was much dimmer than it had been. My first thought, being a member of the grumpy old man club, was one more failed promise! I was convinced to install an LED bulb instead of an older style bulb by the promise of crusading politicians that the LED bulb would last 14 years especially since we don't turn that light on very often. It only made it nearly 3 years—another tough disappointment to face in my already *difficult* life. 😊
- I have not told you this because I want to form a club of those of us now confused when we shop on the lightbulb aisle. I have told you this sad tale of a failed lightbulb because the word of wisdom for this day from Paul's letter to the Philippians is "**shine!**"
- My LED bulb not only failed its warranty. My light bulb now failed its purpose. It was no longer shining with a light that fulfilled its purpose—its reason for being left there in the middle of my front yard.
- It still glows but now instead of giving off the light of a 100 watt or even 60 watt bulb—don't even get me started on "lumens!"—now my bulb look more like a "fairy light" bulb as they call them in England—one of those Christmas tree lights in the strings that you

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have to replace every year even though they are warrantied for two years.

- The fairy light may have still given a Narnia glow—it was there and doing something—but it was not doing what it was meant to do—what it was put in place to do. It was not shining brightly to light the way!
- This current series of sermons is meant for a church that is potentially "*on the move*," in more ways than one. Together we have considered a train of thought taken from Pauls' letter to another church "on the move. It was the church existing centuries ago in the Roman imperial colony of Philippi. They too were on the move in at least one of the ways we are facing.
- They were "on the move" for God's mission. They had "partnered" with Paul and actively shared with him in seeing that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was being spread through their world.
- They understood, from the very beginning of being *born again*, that they had a purpose together as a church. That purpose was NOT focused on their own preferences for worship, comfort in activities, desires for friendship or need for gaining personal significance.
- They understood from the beginning that the *church* did not exist, as a church, for their own sake but for the sake of the world God loves—the world for which Jesus Christ died.
- They understood church was not about making friends and enjoying human companionship but about making disciples.
- They understood that the church was not about having a place for them to shop to fill their felt needs in a spiritual way like the marketplace in the city was there for them to fulfill their preferences for personal consumption at dinner.

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- They understood they were to "ask not what their church could do for them but what their sacrificial part was on God's mission."
- By missional metrics, they were a "good" church. However, there was a danger that circumstances might knock them off the mission.
- First, persecution, for being known as followers of Jesus Christ was coming or it had already arrived. As a Roman colony that served somewhat as a retirement community for Roman soldiers, there were many people in the city that were staunchly loyal to Rome and to the emperor.
- They liked the "good news" of Caesar's protection and leadership. Their "lord" was the emperor. The Philippian church's claim that the true "good news" is that Jesus saves and he is the absolute Lord of all the universe conflicted with the message that Caesar is Rome's savior and lord.
- It was becoming more and more dangerous to be a Christian *publicly* on God's mission in Philippi. Paul knew what this was like because he was experiencing the same thing in prison elsewhere for his *public* display of the Gospel.
- Secondly, the church was being injured from the inside out as well as from the outside in. Two leading women were fighting and the division it was causing in the body would hurt the church's ability to be on God's mission if there was no reconciliation.
- The women would not have to agree on everything—favorite colors, how much spice to put in Philippian taco sauce, etc., etc. However, they would need to love each other and agree on the heart of the mission of the church or Philippi was in danger of being listed as a failure in the first chapters of the book of "Revelation."
- They would be in danger of becoming a church whose candle, gaslight or bulb still glowed a bit like a church but whose bulb no

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longer shined. They would have become worthless to the mission having lost the purpose for their existence.

- They might still open their doors on Sunday and do some spiritual looking things—that's what I mean by still glowing a bit like a church—but that churchy-looking glow would do little but confuse a watching world. It certainly wouldn't light the way in any meaningful manner.
- By way of review, what have I suggested so far was leading to this sad possibility? What makes all of this meaningful to us—Fellowship Bible Church right now?
- The last Sunday in August after leaving an honest friend and prophet, *Habakkuk*, I spoke to you about the ***ambiguity*** we might be experiencing both individually and as a church.
- The first week of September, I suggested to you that a kind of ***scarcity***, the loss of something we were used to and expected always to have might be contributing to this *ambiguity*. I also pointed out that scarcity, in these terms, could lead us to *fear, anger and conflict* as a body or to *clarity, priority and creativity*.
- The next Sunday, September 13, I asked how we could choose the positive result of clarity, priority and creativity. How would we know? We would need *discernment*. This is what the Apostle Paul told the Philippians they would need. However, he made it clear that this was a deeper-than-surface discernment empowered by loving truth rather than a desire to maintain a veneer of fake unity by sweeping things under the rug.
- On Sunday, 9/20, we heard Paul say that all of this will require personal *sacrifice*. The true mission of the church is a personally sacrificial mission and there is now way to escape the suffering that brings and to stay on the mission of God—to shine rather than glow.

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- Happily, Martin Luther included suffering and sacrifice as an element that defines a true church.
- On 9/27, we walked on "*holy ground*" in *Philippians 2:1-11*. We were reminded that it is living with a specific *attitude*, on the mission that makes the sacrifice possible. Of course, this attitude is the humble servant, sacrificial attitude of Jesus Christ himself who died on a cross because of his *attitude* toward living life on God's redemptive mission.
- Then, with my gratitude, Eric Smith, Gave us an example last week from the experience of those first disciples. The Lord Jesus taught them that they would ALL be (or all at least *could* be) part of the mission. "You guys go do this!" That's what he told them and they then fed thousands by the power of Christ working through them.
- Eric's message reminded me that sometimes I forget many of us were taught the mission is for the "*pros*." The mission is for those called "missionaries" or "pastors"—those who have gone to theological schools or joined official ministries.
- Sometimes, just by example, we were taught the rest of us without the official positions are just along for the ride in the church. We are free to live a good American life as long as we show up on Sunday, give our money and don't commit really bad sins.
- Jesus said to that rag-tag bunch of men, who, by the way, weren't officially designated as "pros" at that point, "***You guys give them something to eat!***"
- Now, today, we have a short passage in *Philippians* in which the apostle begins his normal transition from the utterly necessary and important foundational truths—the whys—the purposes that always matter to more of the "hows."

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- Please look at *Philippians 2:12-18*. I've already told you the big idea of these verses. It is my word for today—**"shine."** Don't just glow a little bit like a church but **SHINE** as the church was meant to shine.
- **READ *Philippians 2:12-18***
- Paul is not writing and saying these things because the *Philippians* are enemies of the Gospel mission. If you want to see what he says to churches that inadvertently end up being enemies rather than agents of the mission, read *Corinthians* or *Galatians*.
- These are friends. These people are "*partners*" in the biblical sense with him on the Gospel mission of God.
- These believers have been "*obedient.*" Growing up, we were taught to read nearly every passage like this moralistically as if Paul were saying, "*You guys have been good boys and girls. You have behaved and not sinned in big ways.*"
- However, please remember the context. The mission, and the church's participation in it, is never out of Paul's mind in this letter. Their obedience has little to do with "*don't smoke, don't chew, and don't go with girls who do.*" It has everything to do with their work and their sacrifice for their purpose as a church-- the *missio dei*—*the mission of God* for which they exist.
- Is their "*work*" involved in "*salvation?*" You bet there is! Hard, sacrificial work. Work that looks more like a cross than the crown of a prince or princess of God expecting a soft and pampered life of success.
- Is this hard work we are called to do something that makes God accept us and adopt us as his own? Is it what saves us from "hell?" No! Jesus did all of that hard work and asks us to believe that he did it all in order to be born again to new life.

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- However, contrary to what prosperity preachers would suggest, this new life right now is a life of hard work. The mission of God is hard work. The church of God is hard work. That hard, sacrificial work that causes us to ache with suffering is meant for ALL of us, not just the pros who are paid to do it.
- Why do we ***work out our own salvation*** with "***fear and trembling?***" Imagine President Trump had not recovered as quickly from the Corona virus. Imagine that he was unable to debate his opponent at the next scheduled debate or even the third debate. Imagine you got a personal call right now from our president appointing you to debate in his place. You might take that in stride but I doubt it. I think there might be some fear and trembling. It's not fear of President Trump (OK, in his case it might be but all illustrations break down). It is a "shaking in your boots" over the great responsibility and honor you have been given even to participate at that level in our political process.
- Now, imagine the God of the universe has handed you five loaves of bread and two fish, pointed you to a crowd of thousands and said, "***YOU go feed them!***" We don't have to imagine it. He has said "YOU go for me and make disciples on my mission."
- We *shake* for the honor of mere humans being invited to *partner* with the God of the universe in very real ways to fulfill his redemptive purpose revealed way back in the book of *Genesis*. We shake and quake because our purpose together as a church made up of mere human creatures is to be THE "*image bearers*" of God for all of Creation!
- Or maybe we instead, ***yawn***??! We still glow a bit as "spiritual" people—"persons of faith" as today's politicians like to put it in their lukewarm, meaningless and manipulative lingo.

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- "People of faith??!!" What the "heck" does that mean? How the "heck" does that matter?
- Do you understand why Paul always founds his "what-to-do's" on why? If the **purpose** is wrong or unknown the product and all the sacrifice that went into it is meaningless.
- Someday, I hope to preach a whole sermon on this next idea. Mary and I have recently been talking about it for hours in many of its different forms.
- In so many ways, the current church has become a maker of **bricks**. The church, especially in western culture, has added **the spiritual gift of pragmatism** to Pauls' list. *"Look, they say. Look at this pile of bricks we have made! Look! They are colored as bricks should be. They are shaped as bricks should be! They are hardened as bricks should be! Look at the nice, neat solid stack our bricks make. We have successfully made good bricks. We are the successful church of Jesus because we have successfully made bricks!"*
- BUT, there is a problem. It is a difficult problem to get "successful" brick makers to realize is even a problem. Many of them think those who raise the problem are just complainers.
- The problem is that Jesus' church was **not** called to make bricks. It was called to build houses and buildings and whole cities and nations and entire civilizations for God's glory. The bricks are a mere, small means to an end that is so grand it ought to make us fear and tremble that we have been invited to participate in the project.
- FBC is not a brick factory. It is a whole world-maker. If we lose that PURPOSE and pragmatically settle for success because we can pile up bricks, we may continue to glow a bit but we will not shine and shine in the darkness is what we have been called to do.



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- The fighting—***the complaining and the arguing***—that might divide the church in Philippi must be stopped. They might be able to make bricks while divided but they will not be able to share the purpose that builds whole cities for God.
- The humble attitude of the sacrificial servant Jesus will allow the people of this church to live together and work together for the bigger purpose.
- It will allow them NOT just to glow a bit as "persons of faith" but to shine like the brightest constellations of stars against the darkest night sky.
- This is the love for one another that Jesus said would show the world who they followed—who they were like. It's not simply niceness to one another and doing things for one another that fulfills that command. It's not simply be friends.
- It is sacrificing to be united on the mission of God together for HIS great purposes and not seeking our own desires or even selfish fulfillment.
- Paul can rightly rejoice and even boast about the Philippians if they will shine this way instead of glowing and calling themselves a church when they have missed the sacrificial purpose of the mission.
- Paul is even ok with being a martyr for this shanking, quaking, wonderfully big purpose and says the Philippians—all of them, not just the pros, should be OK with that sacrifice for the mission as well.
- To you, is FBC about ***brick-making*** or ***world-making***? How much would you sacrifice to build whole cities rather than make piles of nice bricks?
- We may think Covid 19 is the most important disease that threatens us. I think it is a different disease. I think it is a disease that has threatened the church of the west my whole life. It is the disease

called "**MTD**" or, spelled out, the disease of "**Moralistic Therapeutic Deism**" named by two sociologists of religion Smith and Denton.

- MTD describes a contemporary form of Christianity that broadly infects many American church folk. MTD (moralistic, therapeutic, deism) holds as its foundations and shapes its values and purpose for the church around a general belief that God indeed exists but he wants nothing more from us than to be nice and happy people.
- The disease of MTD leaves in its devastation slightly glowing Christians and churches that look somewhat like the church of Jesus described in the NT. MTD never produces shining stars and constellations of stars that stick out like the most radiant jewels against the darkness of culture and society.
- A non-religious sociologist named Philip Rieff, in his book, The Triumph of the Therapeutic, explains well how the church adopted this disease as its own and, as a result, turned down the lumens on its light from shining to glowing just a bit. I am going to risk reading to you a somewhat densely worded quote even in my conclusion. Homiletically, this is a sin, but I remind you, if your interest is piqued, you can find a rough draft of my sermon on the website probably by tomorrow and re-read the quotation.
- Rieff wrote, "*...the death of God in the West had given birth to a new civilization devoted to liberating the individual to seek his own pleasures and to managing emergent anxieties. Religious Man, who lived according to belief in transcendent principles that ordered life around communal **purposes**, had given way to Psychological Man, who believed that there was no transcendent order and that life's **purpose** was to find one's own way experimentally. Man no longer understood himself to be a pilgrim on a **meaningful** journey with others, but as a tourist who traveled through life according to his*

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*own self-designed itinerary, with personal happiness his ultimate goal." The author citing Reiff" observes that, "Even church leaders (...) were lying to themselves about the ability of the institutions they led to resist the therapeutic. Reiff foresaw the future of religion as devolution into **watery spirituality**, which would accommodate anything." (Dreher; Live Not by Lies; pp.11-12)*

- If the Apostle Paul were writing an epistle to the good, missional church called Fellowship Bible Church today, I believe he would warn us of this light-snuffing disease that turns a starkly contrasting, starry shine into a barely noticeable glow.
- What happens if we don't pay attention? We focus on making bricks and pleasing tourists—on keeping up a bit of a glow when we are instead called to SHINE in the blackest of darkness around us!!!
- This is why, I have been calling the elders of FBC and now all of us to think not about our next building, our next location, that can keep things going.
- I want us thinking about what is beneath all of that—our fear and trembling purpose. Why do we do what we do? Why will we do what we do in days ahead?
- I personally don't even care to keep the doors open on just a slightly glowing church in a different place. I want to blow the doors off and Shine like we are invited and purposed as Jesus' church.
- I think this is why God let us sell and why he let us do it during Covid 19 with the ambiguity due to scarcity which through loving true discernment of real PURPOSE can bring clarity, focus and creativity if we will keep the humble attitude of Jesus and all continue to sacrifice or for some begin to sacrifice for the mission of God which we are on.