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January 23, 2022

PHILIPPIANS 2:14-18

Series: Choosing Joy in a Post-Traumatic World

Well last Sunday remember the sermon was about... Does anybody remember the sermon from last week? Yeah, it was about complaining. Okay. Complaining and disputing. We did the theology of complaining last week starting in Philippians 2:14. But there was some pushback at the small group. I really appreciate this when the group says, "I have a question about what you said." In this case, they were suggesting that I was suggesting, if you remember last week, that as Christians we don't focus on things that are negative. Okay. We don't complain and we don't whine. And so there was some pushback. "When you talk about something negative, is that always complaining? Are you saying Christians should never talk about negative things?" So we started a dialogue about that. And the answer is no. Christians do sometimes talk about negative things. For example, if there's a problem that has to be solved, first step in solving the problem in the process is to explore the problem. What's the problem? Some of that is negative as we're looking at it. That's okay. Even more importantly, in a friendship or even in a marriage relationship, we don't just put on a smiley face all the time. Sometimes we share the real things that are going on in our lives and they're difficult, they're negative. But there's an opportunity then for vulnerability in the relationship and for that relationship to grow stronger.

So as I look back at the passage now, and in this verse...and you can look at it in your Bible, if you want to open your Bible to Philippians 2:14-18. In verse 14 the first words that we looked at last week are – *Do all things without grumbling or disputing*. So likely what we're talking about here is a focus on life or an attitude about life that draws you to negativity. Not that we can't talk about negative things, but there's some people who are just...that's who they are. It's just all of the patterns of complaining and disputing, and that itself is convicting for us.

But I want to look at the next phrase that it says in verse 15. Because as I look at these words it kind of challenges my own theology. I have questions about this verse as I come to the Lord. Because it says – Don't be a person who's grumbling or disputing so *that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish*.

Now can a Christian be blameless? It doesn't say sinless. What do you mean by blameless then? Can we be blameless? Remember this is coming right after that passage in verses 12 and 13, which says – *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you*. So the fact is God is at work in our lives and we're working out our salvation. That's what the passage says. And now he comes to this idea about being blameless? I think it's kind of a new way... It must not be sinless because I do know that all of us as Christians, non-Christians, we sin. But there's something that's happening here, where a person who lives in the culture is actually moving outside of the culture in the way that they operate, and they are taking on this

characteristic of being blameless. I would suggest what that means is that they have convictions about what the right thing is to do. And if they do something wrong, then they respond to it in a wise way. In a wise and healthy way. They're not defensive, blame other people for their problems, rationalize, justify. "Okay, I made a mistake," and they start going forward. And someone says, "Wow. Look at that person. They are different." They are *blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish*.

Well let's look at a couple of verses that also use this idea because I think God is saying there's a way we can come to that in our own lives. That we want to be different. We want to be considered this person who doesn't represent everything else going on, but they're a different kind of a person.

Notice this is in the Christmas story, Luke 1:5-6. *In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron (so she was a preacher's daughter), and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both (here's these people; look at this) righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.*

Very interesting idea. Can you be considered blameless? Well the idea is you're separate. It's like asking the question, are you a saint? Some people say, "Oh no, I'm not a saint" because their picture of a saint is someone who they make a statue out of because they're so holy or something like that. No, no. God has called all of us who are following Him saint. We are set apart. We're holy ones. And that describes who we are. That's what these first verses talk about. Who we are.

Here Paul also says of himself – *You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers*. He's describing himself. That we were set apart. We were different. We weren't just like everybody else. What an interesting statement that that's making. I think we have to pause there. We have to ask ourselves, am I different enough so that people notice that I'm different? It's not just about doing the right thing; it's about having a response to the wrong things that we do sometimes in life. Receiving correction is difficult. Many people react to it. But there's a way to respond to correction that's wise and healthy and godly. Because it moves us in this place to being "yes, that person's different. The way they handle life is different."

I think the key here is what Paul says in Acts 24:16. Now Paul uses the word 'conscience' thirteen times in his writing. Here's what he says. *So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man*. I think this is the idea of what blameless means. That I have a clear conscience. Paul says – *As far as it depends upon you, live at peace with all men*. There's this sense of being blameless that's significant that says we are different. We're not like everyone else.

So let's imagine here's a man on a business trip. He's a Christian. They're on a business trip somewhere and they clinched the deal and all the guys said, "Hey, let's go celebrate at this strip bar down the street. Oh Bill, we know you're not going to come. But we're going to go out and..." Why do they say that? "Bill, you're not going to come. We know you're different than

the rest of us are.” See, that's what they're saying. He's blameless. He's not going to go to a strip club with us.

Or maybe somebody uses foul language around you and they say, “Oh, sorry about the words there.” Why do they say that? Because they know you're different. Or someone tells you a dirty joke and you don't laugh. They go, “Oh yeah, you wouldn't get that kind of humor.” You see what they're saying? They're saying you're different than I am. There's a sense that Paul is saying in this verse in Philippians 2:14 that we're not the people who are negatively oriented. We're not grumbling and disputing because it characterizes the fact that we're blameless, innocent, children of God without blemish. So verse 15 here talks about who we are.

But now we have to talk for a moment about where we live. So in the next phrase he talks about – *in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation*. Now you'll recognize the word *crooked* there. Because the word *crooked* is *skolios*, where we get our word ‘scoliosis’ from, the curvature of the spine. The problem if your spine is curved is that it's hard. You just have pain trying to hold yourself up. It's just work. And then if you pick anything up, oh your body really hurts because you've got scoliosis. Well the same thing is true in a world, in a generation that doesn't love the Lord, that has scoliosis and twisted, it's crooked and twisted. It just can't bear up. It can't walk in a healthy way. It's always in pain. And when pressure comes, they can't handle the pressure. That's the world that we live in.

Paul is trying to draw distinction between the fact that here's who we are and here's where we live. Those are two different things. And we have to understand there's a contrast between made in the passage. I think you see that on the one hand, we have children of God, and the other we have this crooked and twisted generation.

But then comes how do you bring these two together? What does it mean to be a child of God in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation? That's when we go to the next phrase there where it says – *among whom you shine as lights in the world*. You shine as lights in the world. See, there's a difference between the person... When you start to become a Christian, your friends start looking around and they see that you're changing. You're becoming a different person. And when you're a different person, then there's something shining about you, something attractive about that.

Let me show you another verse in God's word that uses this idea. Because John tells us about the light. The light is very important as Jesus is coming into the world and this is how it's described. Notice this is just after John 3:16, the famous verse. This is John 3:19-21. *This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil*. Now we have to realize this. There's sometimes when you come in and you show the light, but people won't like it because their deeds are evil. They don't want to be revealed their weaknesses. If I want to see something up closely, I'll get a light and I'll shine it on there so I can see what's going on. When I see it more clearly, then I can see the dirt particles, I can see the problems there. That's what God is saying here. When the light comes in, some people didn't want to see it. They want to live with their evil deeds. They want to stay crooked and twisted. And then they have these problems. *Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into*

the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

There's something about light that we represent. When we become Christians, we become this blameless, innocent, children of God without blemish. That idea in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, there is light that shines. We start experiencing that and other people see it because we are different kinds of people and now we have the light.

Now you know that verse, right, where it says *Jesus is the light of the world*. You heard that, right? Well let's look at the context of the verse in this passage. It says in John 9:5 – *While I am in the world, I am the light of the world*. While I'm in the world, I'm the light of the world. But He delegates that responsibility of light to us then in Matthew 5:14-16.. He says – *You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven*. Light. We have that light.

Now I think some people have the light, but don't know how to use it.

I have a grandson. His name is Everett. Everett likes playing with my light. He takes my flashlight. He likes to hold my flashlight and go all over the place and shine it. One of the favorite things he likes to do is shine it in people's eyes. Does that feel good? Do you like that? Do you like when you shine it in people's eyes? What do you think about that? No, we don't like that. So I say, "Everett, give me the flashlight. I'm going to put it up for a while because I don't want the flashlight in my eyes."

I think that's how some people hold the light of Christianity. They're almost obnoxious with it. "You think you're really going to like hell?" That's not a good thing to say to someone you're trying to win them to the Lord. Okay. Sometimes we're just irritating with our faith. We need to hold the light differently. I would suggest that we hold the light in a way that shows the path that we're reflecting. When you have a light, you say, oh, I need to go over there where the light is. We're directing the traffic. We're moving people along. That's how we need to use the light in our lives. I think that's what he's describing now in verse 15 where he says – *among whom you shine as lights in the world*. We are different. There's got to be this sense that we're different.

Some people say this: Well, I know I'm the light of the world. I'm just going to light my candle over here. If people see it, that's great. I'm just going to live a life that I think is good and hopefully people will notice. Well that's great. I think that's a good thing to do. But people also need the truth. They need to hear the message of the gospel that we have. We have to live a life that's consistent with our beliefs. That would be a great place to start, right? Sometimes we say we serve the Lord on Sunday, but on Monday it's different when we're back into wherever we're going.

I like this story of a man who was stopped at a traffic light. A woman was behind him in her car. He was on his phone looking around and doing whatever he's doing on his phone and the light turned green and he didn't even know it. He's just on his phone. The woman behind is getting

really mad. So she starts honking the horn. As she's honking the horn he realizes that oh it's green, but it just turned yellow. So he zips through the light, leaving her fuming right there, having to sit through the whole cycle of the light again. And so she rolls down the window and she's doing the gesture (you know what gesture I'm talking about) out the window. And she's yelling and yelling at him and honking the horn. He's long gone, but she's still mad and she's doing all these things. And then right behind her she realizes there's a police car because the lights come on on the police car. This voice comes out of the megaphone saying, "Driver, get out of your vehicle with your hands up." She has no idea what's going on. She opens the door, stands up, puts her hands up. He says, "Turn around, face the other direction. Place your hands behind your head." She can't even say anything. She's just doing what he says. He says, "Back up slowly." So she starts backing up and as she's backing up he says, "Get down on your knees." She gets down on her knees and he then says, "Lay down flat on the ground with your palms up." So she does all of that. He comes out of his car, gets the handcuffs, puts them on her, and puts her on the curb. Then he goes back into his car to do whatever policemen do when they get into their car, you know, figuring it out, doing all the research. Then he comes back out of the car, he goes to the woman, takes off the handcuffs, and he says, "Oh ma'am, I'm so sorry for misunderstanding. You see, when I saw you with your window rolled down with those gestures and screaming like you were and continuing to honk on the horn, and then I saw the What Would Jesus Do bumper sticker on the back of your car and the fish and the Follow Me to Sunday School sticker, I naturally thought you had stolen the car."

Now I think we need to have our lives in a way that are consistent both on Sundays and during the week. We are the light that people are looking for. We have what God wants other people to have. We want to direct the traffic so people can see that. That's what he's saying here – *among whom you shine as lights in the world.*

There's two ways we do it. And they're mentioned in the passage. Let's just look at those and take the principles right out of God's word here. The first one is this attitude that we're not complaining. We have this kind of positive outlook on life. This is because we're not characterized by people who are grumbling and disputing. The second one is in verse 16 you see – *holding fast to the word of life.* See, it's one thing to have an attitude that's positive, but it's another thing to really be grounded in God's word. Be able to share that with other people because that is the truth. So people need to see experientially, but they also need to know the gospel message. So it says that we're shining His lights in the world so that we're *holding fast to the word of life* so that other people could experience that.

You know when you take your Bible and you are opening it up, you are studying the culture of the kingdom of God. Because you want to know how the culture operates, how the culture thinks, how the culture acts. That's why you study God's word. Or maybe if you like to watch the news, whether it's Fox or CNN or whatever you've got on, you're studying the culture of the world. Now we need to spend as much time studying the culture of the kingdom as we spend studying the culture of our world. Because if we spend too much time looking at the culture of our world, it's going to dampen us, it's going to hinder our ability to shine as lights. We need to equally study the culture of the kingdom. That's why we're *holding fast to the word of life.*

So far what we've done in this passage is we're getting this picture of who we are as Christians. That we're the light. That we don't have an attitude of grumbling and disputing. That we're holding fast to the word of life. That we are who we are, that we're children of God. Where we live is in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation. How we live is with this not grumbling and disputing and holding fast to the word of life. All of these are true.

But let's look at the why. I hadn't seen this before, so this stood out to me. Let's just look at the rest of this passage. Because Paul is now speaking personally about this. He says – *So that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.* What he's saying is, when you guys are doing the right thing and you're living the gospel message, I'm going to look back and say, yes, I wasn't wasting my time." Paul is saying I'm evaluating my ministry based on what lives I've touched. Not how many cities I've been to, not how many churches I've started, not how many arguments I've had for Christ. But how many lives have I touched. That's what he's saying. I think it's a good evaluation of our own lives because as we continue to grow, the question is, how many people have we touched? Are we just running in vain? Running a worthless race? No. We're running a race that's important because the people that we're teaching. That's what Paul is saying. I love that. How am I going to evaluate my life?

And then he gives us a word picture, an object lesson so to speak, of worship. Let me read it to you. Let me explain it to you. He says – *Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.*

Now the drink offering is a part of Jewish sacrificial law. In the Old Testament there were a number of offerings. There was the burnt offering, there was the fellowship offering, there was all these different offerings, the sin offering, and so on. One offering was the drink offering. So the drink offering was usually a cup of wine that would be poured out on the sacrifice that was already burning to celebrate and to make this statement. I'm pouring out this wine on this sacrifice to demonstrate I'm all in. I'm pouring it all out, just like I'm pouring my whole heart out to the Lord. I want to give myself completely to the Lord in this worship experience.

So the worship experience for the Jewish person is they would take a lamb or a bull or whatever they have, and they would take it before the priest, he would slaughter it, they would offer it on the sacrifice. In some of the sacrifices they would participate by either putting their hand on the lamb before it was slaughtered to say I am identifying with the sin here. Or sometimes they would eat a portion of it. Some of the sacrifices they would burn up completely. Others they would eat a portion of it. It was an experience they would cooperate in together. But this one drink offering was a statement that they would be making. They'd pour it out and say, "I'm totally in, Lord. I just want to give myself to you. I want to worship you." That's what it was.

Now how is Paul using this illustration? Well he's saying in essence I'm getting to the end of my life here. I might not live through this experience. I'm in prison now and I'm going to go before the courts, and when I do go before the courts, they might find me guilty and they might kill me. My life might be poured out literally onto the sacrifice of your faith. So notice the *pouring out as a drink offering on the sacrificial offering of your faith.* So you guys are doing a work for the kingdom. I'm doing a work for the kingdom. I am making a statement here. Mine might be over. I'm totally in here. But, he says, *I am glad and rejoice with you all.* Because we're in this

together is what he's saying. That this total dedication sacrifice we make to God we make is something we do together. It's not just something we do independently. But there's some mutual benefit we experience. So Paul now goes back to the whole theme of the book of Philippians and he says – *I am glad and rejoice with you all*. Why? Because we're in this together.

We know that we live in a crooked and twisted generation. We know that people who live in this generation look down at us like we're idiots for being Christians. We know that we're being persecuted for our faith, but we know we have the truth, we know we're the light of the world, and we can rejoice together in that. We can celebrate it and we appreciate it. He's using a worship example to describe that.

And then he makes this final statement. Verse 18 – *Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me*. Because they were a little bit, should we say, disappointed that Paul is now in prison and the gospel is stopped, some thought. No, it hasn't stopped. Paul has said the gospel is continuing to grow even here. You should be rejoicing with me. We're all in this together.

But here's the clincher. We started the passage with no complaining and disputing. And we end the passage with worship. It's like you can't do both at the same time. If you're worshipping the Lord, you're not going to be grumbling. Can you imagine us all coming here and we all get together to sing. We go [grumpily] “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.” You know we're just grumbling about it. We don't do that. We come together and we lift up our hearts to the Lord and we rejoice because we know that God is in control, that God is good, and that God loves us. So when it comes to complaining, that kind of falls off the wayside. It's a worship experience that we do. We have a contrast between the two of them. On the one hand we have the complaining, crooked generation, disputing, twisted generation. On the other hand we have this worship experience before the Lord. For me that's where I want to be. I want to be worshipping the Lord in everything in my life.

That's why in Romans 12...you know the verse, it says – *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual act of worship*. That's what he says. So every day when we come before the Lord and say, “Lord, today I'm going to dedicate myself to you, to serve you. Lord, I don't know what's going to happen today, but you're the most important thing. Lord, I want my day today to be worship.”

You know we come together, we sing these great worship songs led by all kinds of Christian leaders, musicians, and we appreciate them. We don't sing worship songs as the end. This is only the practice session. Your job is to take this worship home and to put it into practice. Take Jesus home and say, “I'm going to worship at home.” I hope you click on the Christian music in your home and you sing along with it. That you're here practicing so you can see “oh that's a good song. We're going to go find what that song is,” and you turn it on at home. We're only practicing here for what happens in the course of the week. Because our lives are all about worship.

When we dedicate ourselves to worship and worshipping God, it changes who we are. We become set apart as saints or, in this case, as lights in the world. That we can be considered

blameless, innocent children of God without blemish. Something happens to us inside. That people see that. We become this light, and of course more people are attracted to that light and want it. That's who we are. That's what we do. And I encourage you this week to go out and do it.

If you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, now is the time. I want to embrace you, I want to welcome you into this whole sense of meaning. You don't want to live in a dark and twisted and scoliosis kind of world. You want to live in a world where God is the light. So if you've never accepted Christ, I invite you to do that today. I'd love to talk to you about your relationship with God and get you connected to Him in a personal way. It's not just about having gone to church when you were younger or having Christian parents. It's about you having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that transforms you from the inside out. And it's not just a Sunday thing. It's not like I have enough religion in my pocket. This is all in. We're totally in. Everything we do is focused on Jesus Christ. Amen?

I know you guys agree with me and I appreciate that. Here we are to be inspired again another week to serve God in everything you do. Would you stand with me and let's worship the Lord together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you. We dedicate ourselves to you again this week. We know that we are the church. That we represent you. That you called us to be a light in the community, that people need hope. Lord, I pray that you'd use us as individuals and as a church to reach this dark world around us. Lord, people are feeling the pain now. I pray that you'd make it known that there's a hope that's found in Jesus Christ. We ask this in your name (and all Gods' people said), amen.

Let's sing this worship song all about the church and its power.