

# Lights in the World

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[ 0 : 01 ] So, welcome again. As Dan just said, as he read the Gospels, the Gospels all tell a story, and that's a story about the God who created this world and us sending His Son to die to restore this world.

And it's good news. Christians believe it's the best news that there is. And a way of understanding the New Testament, for those of you who may be less familiar with the Bible or how to understand different parts of the Bible, the Gospels really tell the story of Jesus.

And then all the letters that come after that, which we call epistles, those help us understand what the Gospel means, what it meant for the first hearers and what it means for us, what difference it makes.

And one of the things that the Gospel means or one of the implications of the Gospel has to do with the way we understand God's work in our lives. Christians, if you're not a Christian, if you've ever been around Christians, you hear us talk about the work of God or God's workmanship or God being at work.

And this is one of the implications of the Gospel. And it's one of the things that sets the Christian faith apart from other religions, especially in Jesus' day. Because in the early days of the church, all of the other pagan gods, the Greek or Roman gods, they had something in common.

[ 1 : 34 ] And that is they needed to be invoked or awakened or appeased. In other words, you needed to get their attention. You know, these were gods and goddesses who were sort of off doing their own thing, living their lives, you know, partying, sleeping.

They could be out. They could be hungover. They could be chasing a love interest. They could be doing any number of things. But the idea was that they may not even really be thinking about you at all.

And what you had to do as a human being, if you wanted that god or goddess to intervene on your behalf is you had to get their attention. And so you would cling cymbals together and you would make lots of noise and you would sing and you would dance.

And you would do all of this to get their attention. And then you would do acts of devotion, hoping that this god or goddess would take notice of you and then decide to intervene and to help you out.

And the reason I bring this up, kind of a history lesson, is that I think that actually many people today, Christians included, think of God, the God of the Bible, the same way.

[ 2 : 46 ] In other words, we sort of functionally act as though God is kind of out there. He sort of set things up, set things in motion. And he's more or less kind of not concerned with our daily lives and the details.

And that if we want God to intervene, that we have to sort of get God's attention. Normally we think of just praying hard enough or praying earnestly enough or making sure that when we pray, we really mean it.

Or praying in the right shape or the right pattern or using the right words. As though there's some sort of code. And if we can crack that code, God will intervene.

But what we'll see tonight is that the Bible actually paints a very different picture of God. The God of the Bible, who we've come to know through Jesus, is actually radically different. And what we see here, particularly in the book of Philippians, which we'll be looking at tonight, is that God is always with us.

He's always with us. And more than that, He's always at work in our lives in the tiniest of details, regardless of whether we're aware of it or even ask for it.

[ 3 : 58 ] So the Christian life isn't about convincing God to intervene and work on our behalf. The Christian life is actually about recognizing that God has intervened and that He is at work and then what it means to respond to that.

So our entire life is a response to God's intervention and God's ongoing work. And so we're going to learn more about this. We're going to look at Philippians chapter 2, verses 12 through 18.

And we're going to see that this truth that God is always at work in our lives has three implications that Paul draws out here. Three implications I'll summarize in three words.

Transformation, illumination, and celebration. Transformation, so personal change and growth. Illumination, I'll explain a little more about that. And then finally, celebration as we celebrate this together.

So let's pray for the Lord to lead us as we open His Word. Heavenly Father, we do ask that You would be true to Your Word. You promised to speak to us.

[ 5 : 05 ] We know that You do Your work through Your Word. And so we pray that that would happen. I pray that for myself and for all of us gathered here. We pray this in Your Son's name. Amen. So God is at work.

He's always at work. And the first implication of this is transformation for us. So Paul says in Philippians chapter 2, beginning in verse 12, he says this, Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence.

So Paul's in prison, writing to the Philippians, a church he planted about ten years earlier. He says, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work, for His good pleasure. So the promise of the gospel is not only that we have hope of salvation, but actually that we have hope of transformation.

And when we talk about transformation, the word that Christians use is the word sanctification. But these verses raise kind of a crucial question. When it comes to transformation or when it comes to sanctification, who is the one responsible for that?

[ 6 : 27 ] Who's actually doing the work of transformation? Is it up to us? Or is it up to God? Which is it?

In other words, you might ask the question, is the Christian life an exercise in active obedience or in passive trust? The older language that used to be used for this is, are we called to pietism or quietism?

Active obedience or passive trust? Because on the one hand, Paul seems to be saying, Obey God even more now that I'm gone because it's up to you to work out your own salvation.

He's essentially saying that. It's up to you. It's on you. And some of us, I think, tend to think of our faith in this way. We tend to think it is completely up to me.

It is on me and I need to get going. And maybe if you're like this and maybe if you're wired this way like some of us are, if you think about your experience of your faith, you typically feel like you're not doing enough.

[ 7 : 36 ] You know, some of you just typically feel guilty. Church, your faith, scripture, prayer, it all kind of reminds you that you should be doing all of it more. And you have this constant nagging sense that you're falling behind.

And this is your experience. And I know some of you, I know your backgrounds, I know some of you are coming out of fundamentalist, very legalistic families. You grew up in church cultures like this.

And so that's a struggle for you. So some of us lean in this direction. We think it's all on me. But on the other hand, in the same breath, Paul goes on to say, God is the one who works in you, both to will and to work.

In other words, Paul in the same breath says, it's up to you, work it out on your own. And then he says, but you know what? Actually, God is the one who not only does the work in you, but he's the one who makes you want the work to happen in you.

He works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. And so people who tend to think that this is the way transformation happens, if you've ever heard the phrase, just let go and let God.

[ 8 : 44 ] You ever heard that? Let go and let God. This is the approach that says, you know, anything that I do, any effort that I put forward is a denial of the gospel of grace. If it's all about what God is doing for me, then I don't need to do anything.

It's all about what God does. If you've ever heard of what's called Keswick theology or the Keswick movement in the sort of Lakes District of England, this theology sort of sprang up in the early 20th century.

And this is a big marker of this way of thinking. It's the let go and let God. And it's a sort of a rejection of legalism in favor of a kind of mysticism. So it's a spirituality that says, it's all about my subjective experience of God.

That faith and growing in my faith is really having spiritual experiences. It's sensing God's presence and sensing God's love and feeling God's embrace. And there's a lot of feeling language around this. And so people say, that's the way you, but any kind of effort or discipline or spiritual disciplines, anything, that's suspect as a denial of the gospel.

So what does Paul say? And this is where it gets really interesting because it's very admittedly a paradox. Paul says, is it up to us or is it up to God?

[ 9 : 59 ] Yes. He says both. And I don't even pretend to understand how it all plays out. I cannot chart it out for you on a spreadsheet. I don't, it's a mystery. But in some way, what Paul is saying is this.

As we cultivate spiritual discipline and cultivate virtue and cultivate character, as we seek to obey Jesus, God somehow works through these things to change us.

Somehow in our misguided, often mixed motive efforts, God actually works. And this, by the way, is the job. This is the role of the Holy Spirit.

To do this kind of sanctifying work in and through us as we seek to be sanctified. It can be a bit confusing. So perhaps it's helpful to think of this in terms of an image.

You know, I've heard John Ortberg say that spiritual transformation and growth is kind of like a trip across the ocean. It's like trying to get from one side of the sea to the other.

[ 11 : 03 ] Right? So some people, for the people who think it's all about my effort, I've got to work out my own salvation, it's all on me. That's kind of like trying to get across the ocean in a rowboat.

Right? And it's going to lead inevitably to burnout, to exhaustion, to frustration. If you think that your change and your spiritual growth all depends on your effort, then sooner or later you're going to be burned out.

And there are some people who sort of wash up on the shore of our church, who sort of come in and they've been bruised and battered. And they've kind of come out of cultures like this. And they're so burned out that they just need to sort of sit and sort of, you know, they're almost like on a spiritual gurney of sorts.

But on the other hand, people who say, oh, just let go and let God, human effort is not a part of the equation, it's all about what God is doing. That's kind of like trying to get across the ocean, not in a rowboat, but on a raft.

Right? Where you're just sort of adrift. Right? And you sort of push out into the waves and you just sort of lay there. And what's the problem with that? It's aimless. There's not going to be any real progress mode.

[ 12 : 14 ] You just sort of drift around in the shallows. So the best image, if we're understanding Philippians 2, 12, and 13, I think the best image to use is that of a sailboat.

Because on the one hand, there are elements we cannot control, chiefly the wind and the current. God sends the wind and the current. Think of the current as the circumstances of your life.

Think of the wind as the Holy Spirit. God sends these things into our lives. We can't control them. And yet we can discern them and we can respond to them.

And how do you respond to the wind and the current? Well, you put up your sail and you adjust it and you take hold of the rudder. And this really, I think, captures what Paul is getting at.

When Paul calls us, for instance, in verse 12 to obedience, obedience, and then in verse 16 when he says, hold fast to the word. By the way, these are really the same thing. Obedience, holding fast to the word, really the same thing.

[ 13 : 14 ] When Paul calls us to these things, what he's really saying is, this is how we respond to the wind and the current that God sends into our lives. This is what we do.

So when we are cultivating daily habits of prayer, reading scripture, things like this, we're actually putting a sail up. When we put forth these efforts and seek to change and to grow, we're actually putting up the sail, taking hold of the rudder, and responding to what God's already doing in our lives.

So a way of thinking of it is this. Transformation happens when we adjust the sails and the rudder of our lives in response to the wind and the current of God's work. We have control over the sails and rudder.

God has control over the wind and the current. So this is the first implication of the fact that God is always at work in us. Transformation. God is at work. And his desire is that we would grow, that we would change, that we would be transformed, that we would become more loving and more patient and kinder and gentler and all of the fruits of the Spirit would be shining through us.

And that actually leads us to the next point. The more this happens in our community, the more we're growing in this way, Paul actually says something interesting. He says that a community like that actually becomes a source of illumination, which is really interesting.

[ 14 : 35 ] He says in verse 15, he talks about God's people as being in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you, God's people, shine as lights in the world.

Now don't get all hung up on crooked and twisted. That sounds harsh. That's a biblical way of talking about people who have rejected God for themselves or their idols.

He says when the Bible talks about being crooked and twisted, that's what it's talking about. Rejecting God in favor of yourself and the idols. Worshipping created things. So God is saying his desire is that his people would be like lights.

And the focus here, by the way, is on contrast. God is saying I want my people to be like lights in the darkness so that when people are living their lives in worship primarily, like all of us do naturally of themselves or things that they worship like God, whether it's success or family or whatever, that as people are doing that, as they see these people over here who have rejected those things and who are actually building their lives on God and on the truth of the gospel, that there would be things about their lives that are attractive and compelling, that they would provoke questions, that they would want to know more, that they would be drawn to it like a light.

And last week, for those of you who were here, we talked a little bit about this and we talked about the early church and how amazing the early church was at being a light like this. You know, the treatment and conditions for women, for children, for people who had been oppressed in society, eunuchs and slaves, how they could come into this Christian community and be welcomed and loved and embraced and how that was really like a light in this world.

[ 16 : 19 ] We talked about how they had courage in the face of death and torture. We talked about their compassion even for their enemies. And all these things made the early Christian community a light.

And by the way, I think we should aspire to these things. I think we should absolutely aspire to these things. But actually, and this is interesting, Paul actually gives a very practical example.

People who say the Bible isn't practical enough, this is incredibly practical. In verse 14, he says, read it for yourself. He says, you want to be a light? You want to be a light in this society?

Nobody? Never complain. Never complain. This hit me like a two by four this week. Be a light in the world simply by not complaining.

I mean, think about how much contrast that would create in our culture. We really do live in a culture more and more and more of outrage and righteous indignation. I mean, I've been struck.

[ 17 : 20 ] I mean, I've just been catching up on all of the news related to this horrific tragedy in Orlando. It's unbelievable, breathtaking brutality. But a lot of what I'm seeing is people using this as an opportunity to shame or spew contempt onto another group.

Whether it's a gun rights group or a religious group or an activist group of some kind. It's amazing to see how much of a contrast would it be to have a community of people who simply don't complain.

And it's interesting. It says, do all things without grumbling or disputing. All things. I really think, I really, I looked at this, you know, this whole week.

And I really think Paul is saying that Christians should never complain. Not even at the DMV. That it just should never happen. Now, I mean, is there a place for constructive criticism?

Absolutely. Especially among friends. Especially if you're with people who know you and love you. If you've been legitimately mistreated. If you've been legitimately hurt.

[ 18 : 26 ] Should you speak out? Absolutely. You should speak up. So we're not talking about that. But think about if your life is a pie chart. Think about the percentage of time you complain legitimately.

And then all, I mean, if you're anything like me, that is a tiny slice. Right? It's a tiny slice. But see, here is the logic that Paul is using. If God is at work in the good and the bad.

If God is always at work. Then why should we complain? Even in the hard stuff. Shouldn't we at least ask, how is this or that circumstance?

How is this the wind? How is this the current? How is this God creating circumstances for me to respond to so that I will grow? You know, we forget God's goal is not that we would always be happy.

But that in everything we would be becoming more holy. The question arises, and I wondered about this this week. Why would Paul focus on this?

[ 19 : 25 ] You know, if you're going to give an example of how a community could be a light in the world. There are a zillion examples you could pick. Why complaining? I think partly it has to do with the fact that in Philippi this was probably happening.

And Paul's a good pastor and he's trying to call something out. But I actually also think that complaining and a tendency to complain a lot. And this is very autobiographical. I've been thinking about this myself.

That a tendency to complain actually, I think, reveals something about our hearts. You decide for yourself. I'm not going to tell you about your heart. But think about your own life.

I think that part of being spiritually and emotionally mature means realizing a couple of things. And by the way, you cannot be spiritually mature if you're not emotionally mature. Those go together. But being mature in these ways actually means that we realize a couple of things.

For one, it means realizing this. That the world does not exist to meet your expectations. The world does not exist to meet your expectations.

[ 20 : 33 ] More to the point, other people don't exist to meet your expectations. It's not our job. And in marriages especially, this creates a lot of drama in marriages.

Or in dating relationships. When people are really trying to kind of live and share life, you've got to be really careful about expectations. Think about it this way.

You've got two columns, okay? You've got the expectations column and you've got the hopes column. You can fill the hopes column up. You can put all kinds of stuff into the hopes column.

Right? I hope that he affirms me more. I hope that he takes more initiative. I hope that she's less critical. I hope that we don't have to be late to everything we go to. I hope that we agree on how clean the house should be.

I hope that we agree on how much money we should spend. You know, hope, hope, hope, hope, hope. But be very careful what you put in the expectation column. Here's the thing that causes a lot of problem in marriages, is that you have an enormous list of expectations and half of them never even get communicated to your partner.

[ 21 : 43 ] So put on the list of expectations, reading my mind. Right? Be very careful what you put in the expectation column.

Anything that goes in there needs to be something that you agree on together. Because it's not the world doesn't exist to meet your expectations. The other thing that I think we need to realize as a part of maturity is this.

No one is responsible for your emotional well-being except you. No one's responsible for your emotional well-being. You're not responsible for my emotional well-being. Or how I feel.

And I'm not responsible for how you feel. Now, we are responsible for how we treat people. And there's a lot the Bible says about how we should treat people. But we cannot be responsible for how one another feels.

Simply because we have no control. And responsibility without authority is a recipe for insanity. So when someone says or does something hurtful, you really only have a couple of options.

[ 22 : 47 ] You can either engage that person lovingly. Tell them what happened. You said or did this and this really hurt my feelings. But you cannot control how they respond.

You can't manage how they respond. And you can't hold them responsible for how you feel. Your choice is either to lovingly engage that person or if it's impossible for whatever reason, you lovingly disengage.

That's about it. I think that usually when we catch ourselves complaining a lot, it's because we've forgotten one or the other of these things. Either we're trying to operate out of the assumption that the world exists to live up to our expectations.

Or someone else exists to live up to our expectations. Or we are making somebody else responsible for our emotional well-being. Or we're carrying the weight of somebody else's emotional well-being.

A lot of you are incredible, compassionate people. And you walk around carrying the weight of your parents or your siblings or your friends who keep making bad choices. And you're the one who feels personally responsible for these things.

[ 23 : 52 ] You've got to have good, strong boundaries. Because what will happen is over time you will resent and resent and resent. And then guess what? You will complain. So you want to be a light in the world?

Trust that God is at work in all things. And instead of complaining when things don't go your way, first ask how he might be at work. So a couple of practical examples. The next time that you're caught single tracking on the metro.

Which will be tomorrow. The next time that happens, instead of eviscerating the transit authority in your mind. We've all done it. See or attempt to see that as a gift of time.

Listen, there's no better excuse in D.C. for being late to a meeting. You can't control it. You can't change those circumstances. You're trapped underground in a dark tunnel.

So what can you do? You can choose to see that as a gift of time. And here's just a suggestion. And I was thinking about this this week. And I actually got stuck on the metro. And I tried it. But use that time and try to redeem that time.

[ 24 : 58 ] So pull out your phone even though you won't get any service. Think of somebody that you want to encourage. And just write an email that just encourages them. And then hit send. And hopefully it'll send when you come into service zone again.

But just do that and see how it changes your attitude in that moment. Or one more example and then we'll move on. If you have recurring meetings like work meetings or small group that you go to.

If you're in a small group or things like that. And say that meeting runs late every week. Right? I'm sure that never happens. Instead of complaining and criticizing the leaders behind their backs.

Instead of leaving and being like, oh, it happened again. And going home and I can't believe how inefficient that is. And blah, blah, blah. Instead of doing all that, why don't you try going up to the leader the next time there's a moment to talk.

And just saying, hey, thanks for doing so much for our group. I know it's a lot of work. Is there any way that I could help? For instance, I noticed that it might be helpful if I could keep time for us.

[ 25 : 59 ] Be the timekeeper. I've had people do that to me. Rumor has it I will tend to go on and on and on.

And I've had people say, hey, would it help you if I was the timekeeper the next time we got together? And I was so appreciative. There's a 99% chance that that person's going to thank you.

Because there's a 100% chance that they're doing the absolute best they can. And they would love your help. So instead of complaining, ask what God is doing. So here's where we are so far.

The more we experience transformation, the more we become sources of illumination. And lastly, this leads into the third point, which is this. Paul calls us actually to join together in celebration. He says in verse 17, Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and I rejoice with you all.

Likewise, you should also be glad and rejoice with me. He's saying no matter what happens, even if I die, I can rejoice. Because why? God is at work. And then he uses the word for rejoice that means communal rejoicing.

[ 27 : 05 ] So he's saying let's celebrate together. Let's celebrate that God is at work. And how do God's people celebrate that? One of the best things that the church has been doing for the last 2,000 years, and then Israel for thousands of years before, is simply getting together and telling stories.

Just telling stories about how God is at work. It doesn't have to be the epic, I was addicted to crack and worshiping Satan, and now I'm, you know, I'm starting a non-profit orphanage in Africa.

It doesn't have to be that. It can be the most basic, you know, I normally lose my temper really quickly, and this week, for whatever reason, I've been praying that God would help me have patience, and I felt like I was able to be a little more patient with my kids at bedtime.

God is at work. We should be telling these stories. You know, I was thinking just this week, I talked with several couples in our community, marriages that are struggling, and these people, they're having a hard time, and yet they said, we are committed because we trust God.

God is at work. All right, I talked to, there's a young guy in our community who's not a Christian, who recently was asking around, is there somebody who would meet with me, and who could talk to me, and help me understand the Bible?

[ 28 : 20 ] God is at work. Right, I talked to, I heard from a woman, who left one of our worship services feeling encouraged, and she has a friend who's making some really destructive choices, and so the friend, she leaves the service, and she feels like God is prompting her, so she finally gets up the courage, and she picks up the phone, and she calls this friend, and she finally confronts this friend, and says, I love you, I care about you, please stop making these destructive choices.

She was terrified to do that. God is at work. You know my favorite example of God at work right now? Here's my favorite current example, as of about 4.15 today.

We've been looking for space for this congregation since about January. This is a short-term thing. We've looked everywhere, and we had more or less accepted the fact that we would probably not be able to stay in Columbia Heights, that we would have to move somewhere further up north or further south, but that this area that we're endeavoring to commit to, we wouldn't be able to stay in.

There's one church that was a possibility, but we've been trying that church for about five years, and not gotten much of a response from them. They don't rent to people. They've never rented to anybody, and they were just not interested.

Well, it just so happens that when we bought our house, we planted the church in around 2007, 2008. Laura and I bought a house and moved in in 2009 into Brooklyn, and it just so happened that we moved into the house next to the home of the pastor emeritus of this church.



[ 29 : 56 ] He was the pastor of Canaan Baptist for 29 years. So we got to be friends with them, and we thought, well, that's kind of interesting. I wonder if God's up to something. And then years pass, and we've been in other spots and other spaces, and still no return phone calls.

And then I got to be friends with a network of African-American pastors, sort of led by a guy named T.L. Rogers. And T.L. Rogers has become a good friend of mine, and I go out to their house once every six weeks and have breakfast.

His wife makes breakfast, and a number of pastors just get together and talk and pray. It's one of the most life-giving things I do in my time right now is to go to those breakfasts. And these guys found out that we were looking for space, and they found out some of the circumstances of that.

And so T.L. kind of gets in touch with me afterwards, and he says, well, what are the spaces that you're interested in? And I tell him a couple of things, and I say, but you know what would really be great is Canaan Baptist.

It's right up the road, and it's across the street from the house that we started the church in. And that would be really great, but we haven't been able to. He says, well, I'm going to take that guy out to lunch. So he comes into the city, and he gets a hold of this pastor, and he takes him out to lunch, and in the course of that lunch, he says, you should really consider talking to Church of the Advent.

[ 31 : 08 ] I'll vouch for him. So the next day, I get a call from Pastor Owens. And we start talking, and we meet, and things look good, but you know, they've never rented, and there's a lot of questions.

And so they really don't feel like they know us. And so they need to bring this before the congregation, and a lot of uncertainty, and we just got to see what God's going to do. Well, then, I was talking to Julie and Eric the other day, and Julie and Eric Davis, and they said, you know, this woman came by, and she's been a friend of ours in our building, and she was bringing our daughter Madeline a birthday present, and we started talking, and she said, actually, it's, you know, this Sunday, I'm a part of a church, and we have to decide whether or not we want to let this other church rent our space, and we've never done that before.

And Julie says, are you talking about Church of the Advent? And she says, yeah. And she says, you go to Canaan Baptist? Yeah, I'm a trustee at Canaan Baptist. I'm one of the ones making the decision. And then we fast forward to today.

Actually, I should say, last week, a couple of their deacons visited, and a bunch of you guys talked to them, and you may not have even known that they had any connection to Canaan Baptist, or that we were even interested in Canaan Baptist, but they had a wonderful time, and they said that you guys were, that everybody who talked to them loved them and welcomed them, and they felt really encouraged.

So praise God. God is at work. And so today, just before the service, I get a text from Pastor Owens. He says, we just had the vote, and it passed. And our...

[ 32 : 45 ] That would have been a really bad story if it hadn't passed, right? But it passed, and so he said, our trustees will be reaching out to you, but we look forward to welcoming you to be our attendance at Canaan Baptist.

And so we're very excited about that. It's actually enormous evidence of the ways I believe that God is at work, even in the mundane details of our life, like where we meet on Sunday evenings.

So God is at work. God is at work. God is at work. God is at work. The point is, I think the more we share these stories and celebrate, the more we learn how to see ways that God is at work.

So whenever you gather, whenever we get together, even informally, try to make it a point to share stories of the ways God is at work. There's going to be an opportunity in our members meeting right after the service to stand up and to share stories of the way God is at work.

So be thinking now, what are the stories that we can share of the ways, great or small, that God is at work? So as we said at the beginning, the Christian life isn't about convincing God to intervene and to work on our behalf.

[ 33 : 51 ] It's about recognizing that he has intervened in Jesus Christ to save us and to restore us, and that he is at work in the Holy Spirit, making all things new.

And so the Christian life is about knowing that and discerning it and then responding to it. You know, one phrase, just in closing, one phrase in this passage that I never quite understood is where it says, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

And I wondered, what does that mean, fear and trembling? I know we talk about God and approaching God with fear and trembling, but why would we talk about that with regard to ourselves and God's work in us? And I was thinking about that this week and I was sitting in my office and I was sitting at my desk and I kind of realized what I was looking at, which is this beautiful painting called The Wounded Healer done by a member of our congregation, Lauren Hofer.

If you've ever been in my office, it's that big, red, gorgeous painting. And I looked at that and then I kind of rotated around in my chair and I looked at my bookshelves and I have these beautiful wooden bookshelves that were made by hand by a guy in our congregation named Serge Metis.

And I looked at this painting and I looked at it and I thought, these things are so precious and they're so beautiful and I thought about the last time I had to hang that painting and when I put those shelves into place and I thought, you know, how did I handle those things?

[ 35 : 18 ] I handled them with fear and trembling. Why? Because they're precious and the reason they're precious is because somebody lovingly made them by hand. And then it sort of clicked in my mind, that's what we are.

That's why he says fear and trembling. Because we are like works of art. The good news of the gospel is that in Jesus, God intervened and through the Spirit, God works to transform us, to enable us to illuminate the world and to celebrate God with our lives.

And so, we ourselves are like pieces of art and yet the amazing thing is this. Believe it or not, we are infinitely more valuable even than that painting, even than those shelves.

We're infinitely more valuable because God himself is the artist and as Scripture says again and again and again, we, we are the work of his hands.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank and praise you. We know that actually even now through the prayers that we pray, the word that we hear, the songs that we sing, through the meal that we share, through even the, the, the malfunctioning microphones and sirens, the disruptions, that Lord, through all of this, that somehow mysteriously and amazingly you're at work.

[ 36 : 48 ] We pray that we would have the eyes to see your handiwork, to recognize your fingerprints on our lives. We pray this for our good and for your glory.

In your Son's name. Amen.