

Shining for Christ

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- [0 : 00] So Paul, having in the second part of chapter 1 spoken about his own attitude to his life, which was of course, since he's in prison here, under threat, with no certainty ahead, with constriction and restriction multiplied around him, he's chained to one of the imperial guard under house arrest in Rome.
- As far as Paul is concerned, as long as Christ is preached, then he will rejoice. And if what has happened to him has meant that Christ is being preached more, then he will rejoice more.
- And as he looks ahead, if he's going to die or live, as long as Christ is exalted in his body, he's a happy man. And whatever else is going to happen, well, whatever.
- As long as Christ is exalted, he's contented. And he urges upon the Philippians, in the last part of that chapter, that they too put Christ first.
- And if Christ is first in your life, then come danger, come affliction, come persecution, then those things won't really be too significant.
- [1 : 34] Because Christ is first in your life. Now, all that is going somewhere in the letter to the Philippians.
- Paul didn't write sort of individual sermons that could be stood alone. So, when we begin chapter 2, we see Paul pressing home that point that he's made towards the end of chapter 1 about what it means for them to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ.
- So, if you've got the passage open, have a look at chapter 1, verse 27 with me. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are...
- And then follow these things which spell out what it means to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.
- Now, we need to sort of take something from that to carry forward into chapter 2 for a moment. So, a little bit of a sort of a bridge, if you like, from chapter 1 to chapter 2.
- [2 : 55] Paul is writing to one fellowship. He's not writing to a group of individuals who will happen to be in the same place hearing the letter. Now, what Paul is writing within, in his culture, and what Paul was writing to within the culture of the church, is very different from our own culture.
- Our own culture is and has been, for two or three centuries at least, strongly individualistic. Ever since about 1620, when René Descartes came up with his famous I think, therefore I am thing, what we can know, what we can be certain about, and what we can be preoccupied with, has been sort of found within the individual.
- And that turn, there were many other things going on at the same time, has sort of, it's left its mark right throughout our society and our culture. So, even though now we would say we are very strongly individualistic, actually we always have been.
- What we're seeing now is simply the fruition of centuries of the way things are, according to our Western world.

Why am I saying this? Because it is very difficult for us to come to church and hear a sermon, read a passage, and not think, as individuals, that this is a passage for me.

[4 : 40] And I will get my benefits from it, and I will go away again, and live my life through the coming week, and try and put this into action in my life.

And we just happen to be together because we can meet at 6pm in one place, and it works well. And we enjoy our fellowship.

But primarily, what we tend to do, coming to church and listening, is think the way our culture, our world thinks, individualistically.

What is this word saying to me? What must I do? Because of Philipians 2, 1 to 18, that we'll come to in about two hours' time at this rate.

That would not have remotely been in Paul's mind, or the mind of the church in Philippi. They would have gathered together, eager to read what Paul had to say.

[5 : 49] This would be what they would be going through in their minds. What does Paul have to say to us? What do we have to learn? How should we live in Philippi because of what God is saying to us?

How do we work together? So the whole learning experience, learning from God, was as shared an experience as the refreshments afterwards, where we will all drink tea from the one pot, so to speak.

So it is, learning is a shared activity. Learning is for the body of Christ, so that the body grows up together.

So the question, the crucial question is, as we approach Philipians 2, what do we have to learn? Not what is there for me to learn.

What do we take into next week? What is there in this passage which will shape us together as a fellowship? What is there that we need for our shared life that God is providing through his word to us?

[7 : 09] See, all the personal pronouns are plural. Because all the personal pronouns in the passage that we're reading are plural.

Every you is a you plural. You. If you come from certain parts of Glasgow. Or some parts of England as well, Liverpool or thereabouts.

You. So when Paul says, if there is any encouragement to Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind.

And all the imperatives do nothing from rivalry. Count others more significant than yourselves. They are all plural imperatives.

So, the question in our mind should not be, what can I get out of the sermon tonight? But what do we, how are we being shaped as a church by God's word tonight?

[8 : 28] It takes a lot to get out of the habits that we have learned over many years. Those individualistic habits in the way we think.

It takes a lot to retrain your brain to go a different way. But it can be done. So what is the Lord saying through his word to Garibaldi Free Church as a whole to use?

Well, there are three things. There are always three things. Every verse in the Bible has three parts to it. Every paragraph has three parts. It's a well-known fact that the whole word of God was inspired in sets of three. So every chapter can be broken apart in three parts.

I'm kidding. It's not like that really. There are three parts to this. The first is that together Paul is saying to the church in Philippi be humble.

Be humble. If Christ is exalted in your life and that's the main deal. If Christ being preached is the main deal. If Christ being first in your life.

[9 : 41] If Jesus is the main deal in your life then there is a natural reason to be humble. None of us is great when we are together before Christ who is great.

So a little bit of personal disclosure here. I spent a weekend at Balmoral with the Queen and Prince Philip and the Rothsches were there as they're called in Scotland Charles and Camilla and Edward and Sophie were there and I was preaching at Crathis so I got the weekend with them at Balmoral and it was fantastic.

I mean it was surreal completely surreal but it was really actually very relaxed and very easy once I got over the sort of ten seconds of terror before I was introduced to the Queen and then it was fine.

Nobody nobody in the room and there were there was the old earl scattered around and the old duke and all that kind of thing staying on from a few days shooting nobody nobody nobody could possibly pretend that they were important.

I mean anybody as we were relaxing the drawing room after dinner or something or out for a barbecue as we were wanting nobody around the table there could pretend it especially when like the Queen Philip's on the barbecue the Queen's helping set out the table and all the rest of it at the lodge for the barbecue nobody was going to think hey I'm special why?

[11 : 24] because the monarch was there you know like if the monarch's there you better realise that there's only really one special person in the room and that's her if she says it's Christmas you sing carols if she says jump you say certainly ma'am how high you just it doesn't if Jesus means to us all that he is if Jesus is number one in the life of a fellowship nobody gets to be great nobody would really want to be great nobody at Balmoral that weekend was wanting to make themselves look special it was just enough to be there with the Queen nobody would really want themselves to be an important person because

Jesus is there Jesus is here so be humble he's saying be humble and that humility will bring them together strongly so he's already written in verse 27 about them standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side you get the unity thing coming through there don't you so he presses that home so if there is any encouragement in Christ any comfort from love now have a look with me if you will at chapter 2 verse 1 we have the word if so if there is any encouragement in Christ and it's repeated in the Greek if there is any comfort from love if there is any participation in the spirit if there is any affection and sympathy now in

English we have just that one word if and it has to do two things unfortunately and it's easy to forget that it does two things in the Greek it's a little bit different so the word if in the Greek if it's along with a certain form of other words shouldn't really be translated as if it should be translated as since so there are two kinds of if in English one is a conditional if the sun shines tomorrow at tea time we might have a barbecue if it's a big ask and then there is another kind of if which is a rhetorical if so the first one if certain conditions are met this will happen the second is a rhetorical if there's no real question it's all answered already so we would normally use the word since since it is sunny this tea time we will have a barbecue or whatever turns you crank and it's that second kind of if it's that second construction in the

Greek that we've got here so really it will be way more simple if we translated it the way it was written since there is encouragement in Christ how can you put a condition on there being there might be some encouragement in Christ maybe there is maybe there isn't I'm not sure it's not like that is it since there is encouragement in Christ since there is comfort from love since there is participation in the spirit since there is affection and sympathy he's saying look at what you've got look at what you've got already you have courage when you're afraid together in Jesus you've got courage when you're facing challenges together in Jesus Jesus gives you courage for the challenges that you face as a fellowship ahead you have comfort from love from his love and from your love for one another you have together affection sorry participation in the spirit so you all belong to Christ so you all share in the spirit of God so instead of thinking oh have I got the spirit

I have got the spirit that's nice the thing is well we have the spirit of God together he is amongst us he's moving amongst us he's guiding us together you see how different it is when you get the shared life thing since you have affection and sympathy that feeling with one another complete my joy Paul says by being of the same mind having the same love being in full accord and of one mind one purpose one intention do nothing and then he puts the same thing negatively do nothing from rivalry or conceit but in humility count one another more significant than yourselves let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others wonderful to be part of a fellowship like that wonderful to be part of a fellowship where nothing is done out of rivalry so like there are some churches this is not me talking about gallibos because

[17 : 58] I don't know you well enough and I'm just going to assume this is never the case with you but there are some churches where like the tea and coffee after the morning service is an absolute hotbed of rivalry why because there are tray bakes and other bakes to be made available with the tea and coffee and so there are different people on the rota and you think this is a really loving fellowship and then over the weeks you watch and you realise there is a competition going on in this place and the competition is about the tray bakes and some people feel they've been given the gift of bakes and some people wish they had and some people are just going to absolutely nail this and own the place as far as tray bakes are concerned so there is this rivalry and that's not a trivial example because people get quite worked up about that kind of thing what would it be like to be part of a fellowship where nothing is done out of rivalry where everybody wants to build everybody else up what would it be like to be part of a fellowship where there is the same mind that same purpose that same intention same goal where there is love shared where there is full accord full agreement that's a tough one because if you're going to be in a Christian fellowship and have full accord that means that on a reasonably regular basis depending on your temperament you're going to have to just zip it you're going to have to say

I'm not here to win you're going to have to say I'm going to go with everybody else maybe not what I would choose but I'm going to go with everybody else because our being together is more important than me getting my way so this isn't for this isn't for wimps that is a tough thing to do as the old saying goes if you think it's weak to be meek try being meek for a week it is a big ask for sinners saved by grace because when we think we're right and everybody else isn't we pile up reasons that reinforce our position we look for things that confirm how right we are and how wrong everybody else is we dig our heels in we box ourselves into a corner and it never ever blesses anybody least of all the person in the corner never builds anybody up it never loves anybody why because it's all about me that's not godly and in our individualistic world that is a norm in fact some people in our individualistic world prize that highly and yet in the word of god it's a problem so paul is saying be humble with one another if christ is in the room none of us are that important look at what you've got what difference is it making that other people would notice and experience and talk about and of course then that just flows on into this next thing to be like that the kind of thing that has begun in chapter 1 verse 27 has become repeated and deepened and filled out in 2 1 to 4 then that becomes in the second section that becomes absolutely paramount because it's not just a nice idea it is how

Jesus is who is the one we seek to exalt who is number one in our fellowship and so Paul says let this attitude this mind this disposition have this among yourselves again it's a plural thing it's a thing to share it is yours in Christ Jesus this attitude this disposition is yours in Christ Jesus you've got it then live it and here is this hymn almost certainly it was currency it was a hymn it was something that the Philippines would have known and picked up as the worship of God began to be written down and passed around this is something we can sing to God in praise and so nobody will ever know what the tune was but Philippians 2 6 to 11 is most likely something that they would know it was a song or at the very least a creed that they would say together who though he was in the form of

God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped there's no arrogance in him arrogance comes from a Latin word which means to pull things to yourself now Jesus had everything but he did not clutch it to himself he didn't pull it to himself he didn't say that's mine hands off that's mine I'm not going to relinquish that I'm not going to let go of that but he made himself nothing he did not consider equality with God that he had something to be grasped onto but he gave it but he made himself verse 7 nothing he made himself nothing he who is and was everything for a while made himself nothing still want to be big still want to be important still think it's all about you no we can never think that could we brothers and sisters in Jesus we just couldn't look at

Jesus and think well I need to be special how could we when he who is everything made himself nothing so he took the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death one side point there you see what Jesus is doing as he empties himself and becomes made in the human form human likeness he became what he became a begins with s he became a servant and you see what God is doing there he by becoming one of us and by describing that as a servant who is obedient he is defining what it means to be a human being what

[26 : 10] Jesus came to be was the true and proper man the true and proper human being true and proper humanity is servant serving the father father that's why we are at our best individually when we serve and that's why together as one body we are at our best when we serve one another and serve this world because we're serving the father and that's how it is that's the logic of why it is that by being properly and fully human we will put other people first because Jesus defined true and proper humanity that's what he took upon himself and it's described as a servant one of the biggest jokes in my life was getting a degree called a master of theology

I got that and I thought that is ridiculous how can anybody be a master before God when you're knowing him this is what theology is about talking about God how can anybody say well I'm a master when you're before the God who knows all things and like what you know about him is yay much servant that's what a human being is because that's what Jesus became when he became a human being so we get our idea of what we're supposed to be like and what a true human is in this passage as well so being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death this is Jesus this is the one who was in the form of God who was equal with

God by nature becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross so he's gone down there is heaven down like a man down like a servant down obedient down obedient to death and the lowest of law is death on a cross under the very curse of God therefore the father has highly exalted him there's that word again that we were encountering this morning has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the father Putin is going to bow before God Putin is going to bow and bend his knee before Jesus and say you are Lord and so is Donald

Trump and Theresa May so am I because because he is and one day it will will be utterly undeniable Ant and Dec will bow their knees and say to Jesus you are Lord of course you will either do that with a smile on your face face because you're seeing your Jesus or you'll do that with terror on your face because you know you've rejected him and you were wrong and you're going to face the consequences so why should we be humble why should we be of one mind why should we put one another first in humility count others more significant than yourselves why because Jesus did and we have his disposition his attitude and then of course

Paul adds another therefore therefore my beloved as you have always obeyed so now not only in my presence but much more in my absence obey but here he describes it as work out your own salvation with fear and trembling live it out and he describes the living out of the salvation work it through work it out live it do it make it work in your life together work it out with fear and trembling and humility before God why how can you do that because God works in you both to will and to work both to will and to do for his good pleasure isn't it wonderful that God gives us a desire to work together for him with one mind full accord he gives us a desire for that he teaches by his spirit that that is a good thing he teaches that that's a valuable thing but he doesn't just teach us a desire and an intention he is the power and the strength then to do it we all want to be one together how are we going to do that the world of flesh and the devil will tell us otherwise well God is bigger than the world of flesh and the devil

[32 : 41] God works in us not just to want but to do it's not just the road to hell that's paved with good intentions the road to all sorts of other places before then is also paved with good intentions but God works in you works in us together collectively to want to do his will and to do his will that which pleases him and so he sort of spells out even more the kind of thing that he's been talking about from chapter 1 verse 27 onwards do all things without grumbling or questioning that's a tough one that is a tough one for some of us maybe we've just got into the habit of doing that

I would hope not I don't get that impression but it's very easy for it to become a sort of a way of thinking well you know grumbling a bit about stuff or questioning stuff it's a kind of a way of feeling a bit better about yourself because you've got a fault to find with others but do all things without grumbling or questioning someone leaves the kitchen in a bit of a mess someone forgets to put out the bucket somebody leaves a tap running it's nitty gritty stuff like that someone doesn't quite miss your car in the car park on the way out that would be a real test of some of our sanctification that would test my sanctification I can tell you so that you may be blameless and innocent children of

God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you collectively together shine so what is he saying in 12 through to 18 he's saying be stars for him first part be humble second part be like Jesus third part be stars shining as lights as stars lights is just another word for lights in heaven and stars sun moon and stars in the world world is a dark place world in the scriptures is not really a category of size and all the countries world in the scriptures is a category of badness it's not the world in its bigness as the saying goes it's a world in its badness world is a system of organizing life together in rebellion against god that's what world is primarily particularly in the new testament so in the world there is this rampant individualism as one american christian judge described it judge robert bork back in the early 90s late 80s in the world there is little comfort from love in the world there is some affection sympathy but not a lot you can easily cross people and that's that in the world it's very difficult to find a group of people as large as a congregation with the same mind in the world you won't find a group of people as large as a congregation having the same love and being of one mind in the world it's look after number one me first in the world it's

I'll be your friend as long as you don't cross me and so he's saying you're different from that that's like the dark night sky you're the stars shining you're a garibost a little well it's no longer a place on Lewis it's no longer even a place it sounds like it's lord from the rings garibost is now a constellation in the night sky well there's Orion there's Ursa Major Ursa Minor Cassiopeia garibost it actually sounds like a constellation doesn't it when he's saying like that there's garibost so different so eye catching so bright in a cold dark world so as you hold fast the word of life so you hold fast and hold out the word of life as people look at you as a fellowship and in your case see that most remarkable and unusual thing of two congregations coming together as one in this way as people watch and notice that you're forging a new future together following where God is leading you together then you are bright in this world now Paul wants that for the fellowship in

Philippi the church in Philippi and that will be for him the sign that he is not run in vain or labored in vain that will be the sign to him that his ministry has counted for something it's made a difference and that will be the sign to him that even if his life has been poured out like the drink offering going back to Leviticus on top of the offering of their faith on the altar all being offered to God they'll be glad and rejoice and be delighted and they should be too what a wonderful vision of what a congregation can be what a wonderful description of what God's gathered people and then God's dispersed people out into the world can be like what a wonderful description of the likeness of Christ not painted on a canvas the size of any one of us but painted on the canvas that is as broad as all of us one picture of Christ on a canvas this broad what a wonderful thing world can't do that reality is that

[40 : 47] God already has let's pray from and that on a man theo