

God's Children As Shining Lights

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[0 : 0 0] Well again a very warm welcome to you all this evening to our evening service and we extend that welcome to those who are joining us online this evening. A few things I'm going to mention from the bulletin sheet you can see it contains all the details as usual about the services this coming week. Just a reminder to the elders there is a Kirk session due to me tomorrow evening at 7 p.m. and that will be in the upper hall here beside the church and there's advance notice there as you can see of a WFM meeting that's going to be on the 23rd of November at 8 p.m. and you can see the details there for those who need to contact Donna for Zoom details because we don't publicize the Zoom login details or connections if it's going out in public just for obvious security reasons. So just get in touch with Donna those of the ladies who want to go. It's a project it's regarding the project Safe Families which is one of the projects that's been supported this year and Safe Families works with families in need obviously but it's a very important charity very important work and as you can see from the detail there there'll be both a worker and volunteer as well as a mother who's benefited from Safe Families actually online for for that Zoom meeting. You can see the services for next Lord's Day on that and I'm told also that the Saturday prayer meeting Saturday evening prayer meeting is being restarted and so that will actually be this next Saturday in the seminary this is this will be in the seminary and that'll be at 7 30 next Saturday. The other intimations there you can I can just leave you to read through them for yourselves. So let's begin worship this evening and our first service first psalm of the service is psalm 34. Psalm 34 and that's on page 40 singing verses 8 to 14.

Come taste and see the Lord is good. Who trusts in him is blessed. Oh fear the Lord you saints with need you will not be oppressed.

Young lions may grow weak and faint and hunger for their food but those who wait upon the Lord will not lack any good. Now these verses marked 8 to 14 in Psalm 34. Come taste and see the Lord is good.

Come taste and see the Lord is good. Who trusts in him is blessed. Oh fear the Lord you saints with need you will not be oppressed.

Young lions may grow weak and faint and hunger for their food but those who wait upon the Lord will not lack any good.

[3 : 3 5] Come hear my children. Come hear my children. Gather round and listen to my word.

And I will help you understand how you may fear the Lord. Does anyone delight in life and long to see good deeds?

Then keep your tongue from evil speech. Then keep your tongue from evil speech. Your lips from lying ways.

Depart and turn from evil paths and practice what is right.

Desire to know the way of peace. Pursue it with your might.

[5 : 1 0] Let's now turn to read God's word. And our first reading is from the Gospel of Matthew chapter 5. Gospel of Matthew chapter 5. We're going to read verses 1 to 16.

This is where Jesus begins what's known as the Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are the Lord. Blessed are the Lord.

And it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Amen. May God follow with this blessing that reading of his word. Let's now engage in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord in prayer. Amen. Amen.

[7 : 1 9] and eternal God. We thank you that your word guides us to the kind of people that we ought to be. We thank you that your word gives us such teaching as we have read.

And truly, Lord, it humbles us and we know that it pulls us up short. Because when we read of these beatitudes by which you taught your people at that occasion and which you teach your people since then through your word, Lord, we find ourselves coming so far short of that standard.

And we find ourselves, oh Lord, so constantly aware of how we are not all that we should be in every facet of life. But we give thanks tonight, Lord, for your forgiveness, for your restoring grace, and for the way that in restoring us to yourself, so you continue, Lord, to provide for us so that we strive to be the kind of people we should be.

Enable us, oh Lord, as we take these things into our minds this evening, that we may apply them not only to our lives individually, but what we ought to be together in fellowship with one another. What we ought to be in our homes, in our places of work. What we ought to be as a congregation, as we come together to worship you. And as we are known as your people in the world, we ask, Lord, for your grace each and every day, for we need that grace working in our lives.

[8 : 50] We need your Holy Spirit to guide us, to comfort us, to rebuke us, to teach us all the ways in which we would seek to be your people in your own presence and in the presence of the world.

Lord, we thank you that your word is without error, that we can safely trust all that it says to us, all that is necessary for us to know. We bless you, oh Lord, for its clarity and for its comprehensiveness in taking account of our circumstances in life.

Even as we find ourselves, Lord, addressed inwardly by your word, what we ought to be in the very depth of our souls is brought before us. We ask tonight, Lord, that you would bless your word to us once again.

We thank you that you are able to speak not only into our hearts, but also into our circumstances, that you are able to bring your own grace to bear upon what we are in all of these different ways. Help us then, Lord, as we approach your throne to do so with due reverence, with godly fear, with an acknowledgement that you alone are God, with paying due heed to your holiness, to the way in which we ought to bear ourselves in your presence and have that bearing in our hearts that takes account, Lord, of your greatness and your holiness, your spotless purity, your all-seeing eye, everything that you have revealed about yourself, Lord, that describes to us your greatness.

[10 : 28] We thank you again as we come into your presence that your greatness has been displayed in the great works of salvation that you have accomplished. And especially we thank you for the way that that has been revealed and accomplished in your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask that in our worship tonight we may exalt you and that he may be prominent in our thoughts and in our speech. And Lord, we ask that as we interact with your Word that it increasingly may make us like him and that you would work in our hearts and lives to that end.

We pray tonight, Lord, that you would give us to increase in holiness, to increase in that which ought to mark us out from the world as we live our lives in the world.

We pray tonight for all our fellow believers elsewhere throughout the world. And we thank you, Lord, that there are many people tonight gathered and throughout this day as the day passes over the face of the earth.

We thank you that you have a people who praise you having been brought to know you and having come to acknowledge you and confess you as their God. And so we pray for your cause.

[11 : 43] We pray for your kingdom to advance us. We pray so often that your kingdom would come, that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We ask, Lord, for thankfulness over those things that we would regard as small blessings though we know that no blessing in itself is actually very small, especially when we think that we are not deserving of any of your blessing.

We pray, Lord, for thankfulness over the ways in which you provide for us daily, the food that we eat, the plenty that we have available to us, the security that we enjoy, the freedoms we enjoy.

And, Lord, on this day that marks remembrance of those who gave their lives in conflict to secure those freedoms. Lord, we do give thanks that they continue to be prized by us.

That we pray for ourselves as a nation and people, Lord, for we know that sometimes, indeed very often, we see these freedoms being despised and treated lightly.

Forgive us, Lord, we pray for the many ways in which we have sought to elevate ourselves and our own thoughts and our own provision instead of yours.

[12 : 58] we come tonight to confess our own sins, to confess that, Lord, in our sinfulness and in our habits, we go on each day coming to realize, as we do from your word, that none of us is perfect or will be in this life.

We ask that you would impress upon us, Lord, tonight in need for our ongoing repentance. We give thanks for all that you promise to those who come to confess their sin and we come confessing, Lord, the sin of our nation and people also, even as we find others in your word doing this.

We thank you for the privilege of interceding for others as well as for ourselves. We pray that you restore, Lord, to us as a people righteousness and holy life, that you would restore to us that right thinking that will place God first in all our thoughts and all our actions.

We ask that this, Lord, might come to spread through our land in the thinking and actions of our people. And, O Lord, we do commend to you those who find such a struggle at this time as they seek to live prominently in the work that they are engaged in, the calling to which you have called them in the presence of a hostile world.

Remember to that end, Lord, those who represent us in Parliament. We pray for them. We pray for those of them who are believers, for those who are not ashamed to be known as such both in Scotland and Westminster and elsewhere.

[14 : 35] We thank you for them. We pray that you would maintain, Lord, in them that persevering spirit, that you would maintain them in their integrity as your people. We ask that you would help them, Lord, as they confront and as they seek to withstand the many wiles and assaults of the devil.

We pray that the mouth of the world, which so often attacks and so often causes bitterness in our experience, Lord, that you would grant to them who represent us in Parliament, all who are God-fearing people, that you would grant to them that grace to be able to stand.

Bless our teachers. Lord, be with them at this time when they have added responsibilities and added burdens laid upon them because of the COVID virus.

We give thanks, Lord, for those of them who belong to us here. We ask that you would bless them and give them in their dedication to know of your own support and of your grace.

Help them as they meet with situations, whether it be individual pupils or other issues that come into their experience. Help them, we pray, to trust in yourself and help them to rely upon your truth.

[15 : 51] We pray that you would bless, too, those who help us in our communities in different ways, especially those who look after our health. We pray that you'd bless them.

We ask that you'd bless those who are ill, those that we know ourselves, O Lord, to be laid aside at this time. We pray for those also struggling with mental health issues. We ask that you would be near to all such, Lord, who bring these things to yourself and seek your grace and your help for them.

We ask that you would, Lord, enable them to continue trusting in you and to continue to look to you. And so we pray that you would grant us your grace to continue throughout the issues that we face in life.

We pray today for those who mourn the loss of loved ones. We pray that you'd bless them, O Lord, some who have lost loved ones in unexpected ways. We commend them to you.

We ask that death may always be blessed to us. We know that, Lord, it is difficult for us to accept death when it comes.

[16 : 56] We give thanks, Lord, that your word guides us here also. We pray that even the most difficult and bitter experiences of life may prove by the grace of your Spirit being applied to us to prove to be ultimately to our good and to our advantage.

And so, Lord, we ask that you would continue to watch over us and to look after us and to guide us and help us to keep to your ways. Receive our thanks now, we pray, and cleanse us from all our sin.

In Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Amen. Let's again read from God's Word. This time we're reading in Paul's epistle to the Philippians.

The passage there we're going to look at this evening. It's Philippians chapter 2 and we'll read from verse 12.

We looked at verses 12 and 13 last time. But we'll just read from verse 12 to the end of the section, verse 18, as we look tonight at verses 14 to 18.

[18 : 03] Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as 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.

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God, without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as

lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

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. Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

In his justifiably famous book, *Mere Christianity*, written around 1952, C.S. Lewis says the following, Enemy occupied territory.

That is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say, landed in disguise and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.

[19 : 29] A great campaign of sabotage. That is what the Christian life ultimately is in facing the wiles of the devil as we are looking Wednesday evenings at that passage in Ephesians chapter 6.

That great campaign of sabotage is as we look to the Lord to use us and to help us as we stand for the truth of the gospel and as we face the enemy that exists in the heights above and uses agents in this world to seek to carry through his purposes.

So, as we look to the Lord, we look to Him to enable us to carry through with this great campaign of spiritual sabotage.

And in this passage, this is exactly what Paul is dealing with as he speaks here about as being the children of God in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world.

But we have read through from verse 12 because it is important to see how verses 12 and 13 really just flow in the thought of this passage flow directly into verses 14 to 18.

[20 : 45] Because all we find tonight in verses 14 to 18 is itself an aspect of what he calls in the previous verses the working out of our salvation.

Because the working out of salvation as God works in His people to enable them to do this, to work out their own salvation, it is not done privately. There is much that we do privately.

You actually take part in working out your salvation privately when you bend your knees, when you go on your knees to pray to the Lord, when you spend time with Him in fellowship or reading His Word, that of course is very much a part of working out your salvation.

But there is that public side to it because the Lord's people, as we find in this passage, are lights in the world, lights that shine for the Lord, lights that in working out their own salvation actually make it known that He is their Lord, that they are His people, and carry the message of the gospel in the visible life that they live as they live in the world.

And the two things that we're looking at in this passage tonight, first of all, we can look at what we can call holy children, verse 14 here, and verse 15, do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent children of God.

[22 : 09] Secondly, we'll look at shining lights, not only children of God as blameless and innocent, but also without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life.

Well, he says, do all things without grumbling or questioning. And the words that he uses there reminded the Philippians and certainly remind us, as we have our Bibles, of God's own words to the children of Israel, to the people of Israel.

You remember when they came to Marah in Exodus chapter 15, then they came to Rephidim in Exodus chapter 17.

These two incidents, short, one following on from the other, within a short space of time, we find that they grumbled against Moses, which ultimately was grumbling against the Lord.

They found the waters of Marah to be bitter. They couldn't drink them. So the first thing they did, instead of looking to the Lord and instead of looking to Moses to lead them, they grumbled. They came to Rephidim, and when they came to Rephidim, there was no water.

[23 : 17] And they grumbled again against the Lord, against Moses, to the extent that Moses turned to the Lord and said, what can I do with these people? They grumbled in such a way that also asked questions.

And that's exactly what you've got in this passage tonight. Do all things without grumbling or questioning. The grumbings that we often find ourselves involved in, especially in the providence of God, when we have things that we were perhaps really not expecting, or things that make life difficult.

We're so prone to grumbling. We're so prone to actually complaining. Whether it's the weather or whatever else it might be, we're prone to grumbling. As fallen sinners, grumbling is very much a part of how we are and what we say and what we do in this life.

But here, he's talking here, of course, to Christians. And Christians are not free by any means from grumbings. And grumbings against the Lord and grumbings against his providence. And finding sources of complaint where really there ought to be none.

Because grumbling and questioning, the kind of questioning here is what you find in these passages that I mentioned there in Exodus as well. Why have you taken us out here of Egypt? [24 : 35] Have you taken us into the desert to slay us? Are we going to be killed here? Are we going to die here? Why have you done this? Grumbling to which is added these questions. And every time we grumble, you see, this is the serious thing about it.

Grumbling is not a neutral thing. Grumbling against the providence of the Lord, small or great, is an act of selfishness. Because as we grumble and as we question in a way that attaches to the grumbling such questions, that's really us being very individualistic, isn't it?

That's us really being self-serving. That's us almost saying, or sometimes even to the effect of saying, if this had been left to myself, I wouldn't have arranged it this way. You know what you're like in your own heart.

I know what I'm like in mine. You know what you're prone to in this respect, as I do myself. This is what he's saying. Do all things without grumbling or questioning.

And then he gives out the purpose of that. So that you may be blameless and innocent. You see, the grumbling, being without grumbling, don't grumble or question in a way that's associated with grumbling.

[25 : 46] Why? So that you may be blameless and innocent. That you may be blameless and innocent in the sense of being without blemish as well. Of course, we're never perfect in this life, and we know that.

But what he's saying is, in the presence of the world that's looking on, in the midst of a crooked and wicked and perverse generation, in that particular context, we'll look at that in a moment, but that's the context that he's really talking about, the context in which they're living their daily lives.

He's really saying to him, let there be nothing justifiably said of you that would bring your Christian standing into question, that would bring your Lord into question, that would find fault with your Savior, that's essentially what the words indicate.

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, so that you may be blameless, that you may be innocent, without blemish, children of God.

God. And, of course, it's to a fellowship that Paul is writing this. He's not just addressing them as individuals, what they need to be in their own individual lives, he's very much concerned for the quality, the purity of their fellowship, for the way that together they show these qualities of blamelessness and innocence, and being without blemish in the context of the world that's around him.

[27 : 19] That's why when we come to chapter 4, in chapter 4 you see where he's saying, stand firm in the Lord, but then he says, I entreat you, Odea, and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

Yes, I ask you through companion, help those women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life.

Now, he's addressing their two individuals by name because they had problems. It looks like they had fallen out over something. They had come to a disagreement and it comes to say to them, I entreat them.

I'm appealing to them, to each of them in turn. And it's interesting that he puts it that way. He doesn't just say, I entreat Euodia and Syntyche. He's saying, I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche.

The entreating is going to each of them. And I entreat them to agree in the Lord. Why is that important? Because the whole fellowship of God's people is really bound around what we are to each other, what we actually show to each other.

[28 : 26] And how we treat each other. And what he's saying to them is, agree in the Lord. There may be things we don't find easy to agree with. Some even of the Lord's providence that we find difficult to agree with.

Things that happen in our experience from day to day. But he's saying, in the Lord, agree with each other. Be on the same platform. Have the same mind.

And this is exactly what's following on from what we saw earlier in the chapter. Have this mind in you. Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus. And as we saw with such great detail, Paul describing the way in which Jesus, the Son of God, descended into this world, made himself of no reputation, took the form of a servant, became obedient even to the death of the cross.

Well, he's now saying to them, do all things without grumbling or questioning. He's saying, just think for a moment again what we were just saying, what I've just said to you, what I've just written to you. Think about that.

I would apply to the Son of God. Who are we to grumble and to question when you actually see what the Lord had to do, what the Lord had to experience, what the Lord had to put up with from the world, what the Lord had in bearing of our sins, the pains that he had to go through, the death he had to experience and accomplish and overcome.

[29 : 46] And that's what we always have to put to ourselves, friends, isn't it? When we find ourselves so prone to grumbling, so prone to questioning, when we find ourselves with the blemishes and the blame that's rightly attached to us, when we don't get on the way we should, when we don't patch up relationships, when we don't actually come to ask for forgiveness, when we let things like that fester, what is that saying?

It's really saying in effect to the world, these people can't possibly appreciate what their Lord has done, they're confessing that the Lord has become this servant of God who died the death of the cross, who put himself out for them, and there they are bickering with each other.

And you'll find of course in the disciples, that's what they were doing as they went on, and as they came to the final part of Christ's journey to the cross, as they actually came even to where the Lord's supper was instituted, what were they actually doing?

They were grumbling with each other, they were questioning, they were actually arguing over who was going to be the greatest, which is why Jesus did what he did and said what he said.

He took off his outer garments, he put on a towel, the clothing of a servant, and he began to wash their feet, and then he taught them afterwards, after he was returned to his place, what I have done to you, you must do to one another, because that's what servants of Christ should be like, like himself.

[31 : 18] And so he's saying to us tonight as well, do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, without blemish, the children of God. And you notice he is saying all things, do all things without grumbling or questioning, do all things so that you might be blameless and without blemish, and act that way as children of God.

All things, yes, everything you should be in church is what you must be at home as well. Everything I must be as a minister of the gospel publicly, I must be that in my own personal relationships as well, with my wife, with my family, with my children, with my grandchildren.

And you carry all of that with you, of course, into your place in the world. Do all things. What a huge challenge that is. How we are confronted tonight with the standard of Jesus.

And you know, the more you confront yourself and myself with the standard of Jesus, if we're really thinking about that the way we should, the more we should then immediately go to himself for his grace, for his help, for his support.

So that's the first thing, holy children. Do all things without grumbling or questioning so that you will be holy children in the world. That you will be the children of God, blameless and innocent, without blemish.

[32 : 46] And then he comes to speaking of them as shining lights. And you see, first of all, the setting in which their Christian life is placed. A setting that very much applies to the setting in which you and I are placed right now in this generation as well.

What is the setting? Well, he says, in the midst of, children of God, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world.

Lord. And it looks like he's going back again to the Old Testament when he comes to speak there about a twisted and crooked generation to the likes of Deuteronomy, the book of Deuteronomy in chapter 32 and verse 5.

You remember this is actually Moses speaking these words that God has given him, the words of this song.

Here's an interesting thing. As you go through with what's called the song of Moses and as you come to the end of the chapter where you say Moses came and recited all the words of this song in the hearing of the people.

[33 : 54] So, obviously, he was teaching them this song so that in singing this song they would remember the things that had actually contained in it and it contains much about their history especially from the time they left Egypt because this is them, they are here on the border of the promised land, the book of Deuteronomy here.

Moses is addressing the people just as they're ready to proceed into the promised land, the land of Canaan and he's teaching them this song. But as you read through the song you begin to think well if I was going to write a song or if God had asked Moses himself or certainly the people to write a song there'd be quite a few things in this song that they would have left out.

You know because it's very difficult to sing seriously and earnestly about your own faults, about your own sins, although we do that of course as we sing the book of Psalms.

But you know as you go through here you come to the likes of verses 4 and 5. Here is God, I began give ear O heavens and I will speak may my teaching drop as the rain.

He comes to verse 4, the rock that's the word for God, His work is perfect for all His ways are justice, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is He.

[35 : 09] And He's prepared first of all to let that sink into their minds before they go on to sing anything else. He wants them to actually have that particular verse, that particular section very firmly in their mind because what He's going on to say is something that really ought never to have been said about them.

With this God, with this rock, with this one whose work is perfect, all His ways are justice, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, that's the God who rescued them, that's the God who came for them in Egypt, that's the God that brought them to Himself.

What is He then saying? They have dealt corruptly with Him. They are no longer His children because they are blemished, they are a crooked and twisted generation.

Do you thus repay the Lord, you foolish and senseless people? And so on, all the way through that song, that is what He's teaching, that's what He's teaching them to sing and think about themselves because essentially that song is a confession of sin, a confession of their faults before God, so that they will realize that this great God, this holy God, this faithful God, this loving God who saved them is not a God that they respond to with ingratitude, with faithlessness.

It should be the other way about, that they respond to His grace, to His love, to His faithfulness, that they respond in the way that here Philippians chapter 2 is putting before us, without grumbling or questioning, being blameless and innocent, children of God, without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation.

[36 : 49] generation. And that, of course, applies very much to our content as well, context as well, doesn't it? This is the context in which the Philippians were placed, this was what surrounded them, this is where they lived out their lives as Christian people, as a Christian congregation, this is the kind of generation that was around them, this was the character of the world around them, a twisted and crooked generation.

generation. And as we turn from God as a people, this is what we show, this is what we become, this is what we are.

The more we turn as a people from God, I know it's of course important to remember that God still has His faithful people in our nation, amongst our people, of course, people like yourselves, people who value the Lord, who serve the Lord, who worship the Lord, people who actually know the Lord, and know that they are His people.

But by and large, I don't need to tell you this, you can actually see it on the news every day, you can see it in what you read, you can see it in the attitudes that are brought up, and many of the things that you actually come to watch in the programs that you have on television.

It's very obvious that we as Christians, that we as Christian people, that we as believing people, are set in the context of a twisted and corrupt generation.

[38 : 13] And we're not extracting ourselves and saying that we are in every single way so different to that, if only it were through. We know, as we said at the beginning, our own tendency to complain and to be questioning about things.

But this is the generation that's around, this is the kind of society that we live in. bent away from God, crooked as it says here in the sense of being bent, twisted.

And you know, the more we're twisted away from God, whether it be in our individual lives or as we take it here as he's speaking corporately for a people, it doesn't matter how much we, however much we're twisted away from God, what that includes is we're twisted in on ourselves.

One of the basics of sinfulness is idolatry. And our idolatry means that we worship ourselves even if we're not prepared to confess that.

But in the world out there and what you and I were before God took us and changed our lives, those of us who know the Lord as our Savior, we know that that's what happened, that he took us and changed us, and changed us inwardly, and changed that, crookedness and that twistedness of our hearts to straighten it out for himself, which is what we need, and we need his help with that as we go on.

[39 : 45] But around us what you find is a very obvious twistedness away from God, and therefore a twistedness in on ourselves as human beings, to elevate ourselves, to replace the word of God with our own thinking, to have all kinds of philosophies instead of the gospel.

our greed, our corruption, the attitude you have to the unborn, to those who are reaching the end stage of life, the attitudes you find to marriage, the attitudes you find that are brought out in different ways in which relationships that we know in the Bible are not acceptable to God, are nevertheless not just followed but promoted.

So much idolatry in terms of worshipping, pornography, nastiness, filth, but it's rampant, and it's not just in our nation, it's throughout the world.

Think of the global sex trade, the trafficking even in children, in order to become sex objects in the West. That's going on in our society.

That's a mark of our degeneracy, and it's in that context that God has placed us tonight, and God has placed us in that context tonight, so that we will be lights in the world, so it will shine for him in this world.

[41 : 21] This is what he's saying, and you see, that's why he's really joining all of this together. Be a people who don't grumble. Be a pure people. Be blameless and innocent. Be the children of God, because this is where you are placed, and the more you are actually the kind of people that God expects you and wants you to be, the more your light will actually shine, because you're placed in this darkness.

Reminds you of Ephesians, doesn't it? The Ephesians were in the same similar context, of course, to the Philippians, naturally, or by way of their pagan background, and here in Ephesians, in chapter 5, verses 8 to 14, remember Paul there speaking about them, how they had come to be lights in the Lord.

This is what he said, chapter 5 and verse 8, where he says, for at one time you were darkness. He's saying you don't associate with the sons of disobedience, for you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.

Don't try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them, for it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret, it.

But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible. For anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you, or Christ will give you light.

[43 : 02] Well, there he is saying to the Ephesians exactly the same thing in principle as to the Philippians, and addressing us tonight with that same emphasis for our lives as well. You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Why has he made you into lights? Why has he made you to shine spiritually as lights and morally as lights? So that the world in its darkness will actually have this light shining in it, shining into it, shining upon it.

Where is the world going to have light if it doesn't have the light of faithful Christians? Where would we be tonight in all the various institutions of our nation?

Where would we be in our schools, in our universities, in our parliaments? Where would we be without Christians lighting up the place? Where would we be without faithful Christians?

And you know, it's a sad thing that sometimes, indeed not sometimes, quite often, the most virulent criticism criticism of people like Kate Forbes and others who are unashamedly Christian in their

walk, some of the most virulent criticism is from Christians, or from confessing Christians at least. [44 : 23] You shouldn't belong to this party, you shouldn't belong to that party, look at their policies, look at what they're actually following by way of their own manifestos, how can a Christian be involved in that?

Well, this is what Paul is saying, you are placed in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Daniel didn't say when he needed to live as a believer, facing a pagan monarchy and a pagan government, neither did Joseph when he had to face the same issue in Egypt, he didn't say, but I'm a believer, you're not going to say that I've been placed in this situation so that I can live my life as a Christian by taking on some authority, by being involved at that level in these regimes.

God says, that's where I've set you, and I've set you there to be a light. So we pray for these people as we do, but we pray for them in a way that would want God to bless them as lights in the world, to bless them in their witness for himself, shining as lights in the world.

It's very difficult, nowadays to, well, it's reasonably difficult to find a place where there's no light pollution. If you're going to look at the stars and the planets on a lovely night, you need to really go somewhere where no artificial light penetrates at all.

[45 : 49] And if you go to Glasgow, for example, to the science museum there, to the planetarium that's there, it won't just be near once, but it was a wonderful experience, because they take you into this place, and the whole of what surrounds you in the roof is a dome, just like you look up into the sky, and then all the lights go off, and you're told, just wait for a few moments, let your eyes settle into the darkness.

There's absolutely no artificial light at all penetrates anywhere in that great room. And then the roof really becomes an image of the sky, the stars and the planets, exactly as they are in the sky. And they're incredibly bright, because there's no corruption of created light or of artificial light in that room. And it makes all the difference when you look at the night sky in a situation that's not too badly affected by artificial light.

If you're out in the desert or maybe out on the moors somewhere where you can find a long expanse without any artificial light in it, the sky is far, far brighter than you can see it when you're living in the town or in the city.

Of course, that would be the case. When Paul was writing this to the Philippians, there was very little of the light pollution that you now have in the modern world. And when they looked up into the sky, they would marvel at the brightness of the stars and of the planets.

[47 : 18] And that is exactly what he's doing here. When he's actually using that as an illustration, he's setting you, God has set you, he says, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. The darkness is great, he's saying, but it's great in order to show you light.

And the more you appreciate the darkness and the greatness of the darkness, the more we should appreciate how bright is the light of Jesus, how bright is the light of the Christian life, how bright is the light for those who stand morally and spiritually for that which is truth.

truth. You see, the world's extremity is always the gospel's opportunity. And Malcolm Muggeridge who lived during the 70s and 80s, wrote some books in that time in one of his books, *The End of Christendom*.

This is what he's actually saying. He's saying, it's not just a matter of the light being, of the darkness being so great, and of human corruption being so obvious, but he's saying, in a sense, that's really what we're hoping for when all earthly, well, I'll just read it, this is what he's saying, it is precisely when every earthly hope has been explored and found wanting, when every possibility of help from earthly sources has been sought and is not forthcoming, when every recourse this world offers, moral as well as material, has been explored to no effect, when in the gathering darkness, every glimmer of light has finally flickered out, it is then that Christ's hand reaches out firm and sure, then Christ's words bring inexpressible comfort, then his light shines brightest, abolishing the darkness. darkness. You see, that's what we should be praying for as well, I'm sure you are. It's not just praying for Christians in the darkness, for people like ourselves to continue faithful to God, it's not even in a way bringing to God with a lament the darkness that's around us, the corruption that we're aware of in human society, what we're praying and should be praying to God is, Lord, bring about a massive sense of failure and disappointment in people who are living for the darkness, in people who are living for the world, in people who think that they can actually save themselves and save the planet, bring about Lord in them a sense of massive disappointment, bring failure in the sense in which they see that that is simply not going to work.

[50 : 01] And the more they come to see that it's not going to work, the more likely then at least it is they'll turn to God and to the light of Christ, to the light of Jesus. And that when you can see then it makes sense what he's saying in verses 14 and 15 what he's saying, do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

What he's really saying in effect is make sure your lamp, your light is kept clean, because you're placed in the darkness so that your light will shine.

But it will not shine as effectively unless you maintain a life without grumbling or questioning, blameless, innocent, children of God without blemish.

So when you're living a holy life, striving for a holy life, what that really is doing is making sure your light shines as brightly as it can be. of course, very likely the more brightly we shine, the more impact that has upon the darkness of the world around us, the more reaction you're going to get. Not everybody's going to accept that by any means. Not everybody's going to be pleased by any means with that. But when you find the church or elements of the church or some sections of the church turning away from being faithful to the gospel and just following the ways of the world in order to try, as they see it themselves, to be more effective, to have that sort of equality, that balancing out between the world and the church, between Christianity and the world around Christianity, what you're actually finding, of course, is the opposite.

[51 : 50] It isn't effective at all because there's no life in that. There's no acceptance of sin in that. There's no confession of these kind of lifestyles being unacceptable or not pleasing to God.

This is what he's saying. Shining as lights in the world. How bright do you want your light to be? Well, you want it to be as bright as Christ can make it, don't you?

And if I want myself to be that bright a light in the world, I have to see to it that I'm pursuing holiness. I have to see to it that the things that I know are dark in my life, the blotches that are still in my life that belong to the darkness, that they're actually wiped clean, that they're wiped away, that God will help me with that.

That's what the Bible is counseling us in terms of holiness. Why are we to be holy? Not just because we are to be pleasing to God, of course, that's one of the primary reasons, but also that we are to be effective Christians in this world.

And that's why he's saying holding forth or holding fast to the word of life. Well, the word there, holding fast, can actually also be translated holding forth.

[53 : 08] And in some ways I think that's a better translation in the context, although holding fast is itself important and would fit the context as well. But what he's doing here is, as he's talking about, as he's seeking them to be these lights in the world, in the darkness of the world around them, holding forth the word of life.

Because the life they're living, if they're living true to Christ, is itself an effective life. You're holding it forth, just as you take a light, as you would in those days, a lantern, and you hold it up.

You hold it up so that it gives light, not just to yourself, but to that which surrounds you. That's what Jesus is saying in the passage we read, in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Let your light so shine before men, before people, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Let your light be seen, let it be shining. Are you here tonight and you're still keeping your light hidden from view? Are you having difficulties with letting your light shine?

Are you thinking of the consequences? Are you perhaps thinking, well, if I do that, my life's going to change? Well, of course. You can't be a Christian without some changes taking place in how other people see you.

[54 : 31] But isn't it the concern of every single one of us in here tonight to shine for Jesus? Jesus. And in order to shine for Jesus, you've got to be in Christ.

You've got to come to him. As we saw this morning, you've got to give your life over to him. How is that world out there going to actually find any guidance? How is it going to find light by which to adjust their thinking?

Because the world does not of itself have any lights, not any lights morally or spiritually that are helpful to them. So in that case, they're depending on you and I being lights in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, holding forth the word of life, the word of the gospel, as it shines into your heart and as it shines out from your life.

That is what he's saying. Folks, I find this very difficult to apply to myself. Let alone to preach about it to people who already know the gospel as well as you do yourselves.

But as we occupy pulpits and preach the gospel, of course the Lord again takes us back when the devil tempts us just to tone that down a little bit.

[55 : 51] That's asking too much of people. That's really demanding things in a very busy life of them that perhaps they're not really able to fully appreciate or accomplish in this life.

It's not my standard. word. We don't make up the standard of the gospel and thankfully when we come at the end of the day to ask the Lord to bless what we're trying to do in preaching the gospel, we can truly say, I hope, Lord, I have presented your word.

I have presented your standard. And because it is yours, bless it to myself and to my hearers.

Shining us lights in the world is not going to be easy in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

But it's essential. And it's essential that you play your part in that. That you don't actually, like some, say, well, you know, I don't need to be fully committed.

I don't really need to attend all of these meetings or services or activities even though I could and I have time to do it. Well, the Lord is saying to you, do you want to be a light or not?

[57 : 06] Do you want to shine brightly for me or don't you? Do you want to have the kind of light that's just like a flicker of a candle compared to a bright beam of light that you ought to be? That's what he's saying to me tonight.

That's what he's saying to you. This world needs light. This world needs your light and your life to be shining for Jesus Christ. And he's challenging us tonight through this passage to be so.

And to be so as a congregation of people. Even though we live in a very difficult environment. And he goes on, and we'll just finish with this because the time's gone.

And holding fast to the word of life. So that, and he's now gathering all this together, so that in the day of Christ, the day of Christ's return, the day of judgment, I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

He's concerned that his ministry will have been truly effective with these Philippians. Even if I'm to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

[58 : 11] Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me. Well, he's talking there about a drink offering, something that, again, was in the Old Testament and accompanied with the accompaniment of some of the main sacrifices of burnt offering.

Well, you find that in the likes of Numbers chapter 15. Just read it through yourselves later on if you can. Numbers 15 shows references there to this drink offering. It's poured out alongside or upon the sacrifice of the burnt offering.

And Paul is saying here, really speaking about his own death, his life being poured out upon the drink offering, the sacrificial offering of your faith. Supposing, he says, it's your faith and your contribution through that faith and my support, that's really the big thing.

I'm content, he said, to be the drink offering in my death, if that's what comes, so that we can rejoice together.

I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me. In other words, effectively, what he's saying is, whatever you do for Jesus is worthwhile.

[59 : 26] Whether it's considered by yourself or others, a drink offering, a small sacrifice, or a large one, it's not really the point. Everything that you do for Christ is worthwhile.

And every time we shine for him is worthwhile. And so there it is. Holy children, shining lights. This is what he's calling us to be to his glory in this setting where he has placed us.

Let's pray. Lord, our God, we acknowledge and confess that your word makes such demands of us. And we confess, Lord, that when we read such things in your word as we often do, we are ashamed of how little we accomplish, of how inadequate we are even to explain it and even to preach on these great issues.

And we confess to, Lord, that our hearing is very often defective, even as we engage with yourself in prayer and in reading your word.

Lord, forgive us, we pray, and grant to us as life goes on that we may be more and more concerned to live for you, more concerned to shine for you brightly as you enable us in this life.

[60 : 49] Bless us, Lord, we pray, to the generation we belong to. Bless us to those who are still in darkness. Bless us, Lord, to the darkness around us and help us to see it as an opportunity to show the brightness of the light of Christ, the light of life.

And use us, we pray, in that way that would glorify your great name thereby. And now be with us throughout the rest of this week. Go before us and enable us, Lord, to be faithful to you, who is always faithful to us.

Receive our thanks and worship now, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's conclude this evening singing in Psalm 119.

Scottish Psalter, Psalm 119, that's page 415, from verse 172. My tongue of thy most blessed word shall speak, and it confess.

Because all thy commandments are perfect righteousness, that thy strong hand make help to me, thy precepts are my choice. I longed for thy salvation, Lord, and in thy law rejoice.

[62 : 02] So on to the end of the psalm. These four verses, my tongue of thy most blessed word shall speak. my tongue of thy most blessed word shall speak, and it confess, because all thy commandments are perfect are perfect righteousness.

Let thy strong hand make help to me.

Thy precepts are my choice. I longed for thy salvation, Lord, and in thy law rejoice.

O let my soul live, and it shall give praises unto thee.

And let thy judgments, gracious, be helpful unto me.

[63 : 45] I like a lost ship, when dost thee thy servants seek and find.

For thy commands I suffer, O to slip out of my mind.

Amen. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen.