

Children of God

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Preacher: John Lowrie

[0 : 00] Warren, welcome to the service this morning. Thank you, Gerald, for leading our worship. And turn with me, please, to Philippians chapter 2. Philippians chapter 2. Can you hear me okay?

Philippians chapter 2. Thank you very much for those who were praying for the wedding last Friday. It went well. Still recovering. Such a tiring day. So, so exhausting. Don't think I've ever had a more tiring day than that day, but it was good. It went well.

She was married. They're happy. They're off, which is great. In a moment or two, we're going to read Philippians chapter 2, and we're going to read from verse 14. But I want to, before I introduce this sermon or series, I want to introduce tonight's. When I was in Derbyshire, I discovered that some of our young married folk would disappear once a year to some big fancy hotel over in Manchester.

for a spa day, of all things. Husbands and wives would go there, and I'm saying, what happens there? And so, we just sit in a bubbly thing, and we get oils and potions, and for the whole day. Yeah, that's what we do for the whole day. And I thought, wasn't convinced. Still not convinced. But anyway, they loved it. They thought it was great. They would look forward to this. Just a day to be pampered.

I know women really like this. Maybe men not so much. But I was surprised the young men, rugby players, yep, they all did that as well. Women like this. This evening, I'm going to begin a new series, and it's like a pamper day, or six weeks of pampering in the evening. And as we're looking at Philippians, Paul issues various commands. Do this, don't do that. Live a life worthy of the gospel. Tonight, we're going to begin just a short series back in the Psalms once again.

[1 : 50] And we're going to be looking at Psalm 23, very well-known Psalm. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down. So, there's no commands in it. It just reminds us of who Jesus is.

So, if life is weary for you, and you're just, you could do as the winter approaches, maybe just a wee pamper before, just to come and to let the Lord's love wash over you. There's no commands in it. You don't have to do anything. It just reminds us of who Jesus is, and how He relates to you.

And I pray that He will pamper us as we consider His Word together, as we consider afresh what He means to us. So, if you want to be pampered, no commands, no, sort yourself out, get your life in order, come out for the next five or six Sunday evenings. I'm looking forward to this wee series. It's a great series on Psalm 23. But let's come back to Philippians tonight. Philippians, this morning, sorry, Philippians 2, reading from verse 12. Let's read from verse 12.

Therefore, my dear friends, Paul writes, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

[3 : 03] For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose. And this is the passage for this morning. Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure children of God, without fault in a warped and crooked generation.

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky, as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on that day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you, so you too should be glad and rejoice with me. We'll end our reading at the end of verse 18. Let's ask for the Lord's help as we seek to study this together. Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you, Father, for the way in which it not only educates us and teaches us, but for the way in which it draws out our hearts towards you in love and affection. And Father, we do just pray for that series this evening, Lord, as we begin.

We pray, Lord, that the love of Christ would be shed abroad in each one of our hearts. But Father, we come to this passage this morning, and we pray, Lord, that we would place our own lives under the microscope of your word. And Lord, if there's anything that you would want to put your finger on, we pray, Lord, that you would do so. We know that you're good and you're gracious towards us. And we know our own hearts and minds that we, as we were hearing in the children's talk, Lord, that sometimes we are disobedient. We wander from you. So, Father, speak to us now from your word.

And Father, we pray that we might be, not be those who grumble and complain, but those who are truly children of God, workmanship of your very hands. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. A number of months ago, Lucille and I were standing at a bus stop in Edinburgh, and it was fairly busy, and there was a guy, he must have been about 75, and dressed up as Elvis. And he was wearing this really dirty white, I think Elvis dragged through a bush, if you can picture that. And there was this younger guy, and he was obviously drunk. He quit a bit to drink. And he kept asking him all the time, why are you dressed like that? Because nobody else, it wasn't as if there was a funfair or anything on.

[5 : 39] He's just standing there dressed as Elvis. He must have asked him about 30 times, and not once did the guy ever tell him. I'm thinking, does he understand English? He just stood there, never answered him a word. And then he would give off, and then he'd come out and say, why are you dressed like that?

It was the strangest thing. Here's an image of some things that you would sometimes see in the tube. They have London, they just got to all sorts of wacky things. You see that many wacky things, you wouldn't bother asking anybody why you're doing that, because I used to say to folk that visit us in London, you can't be weird in London. Everybody's weird in London. It was just, so you would see signs like that, and they would make you laugh. I wonder what that guy would have said to them. The topic this morning, in the passage that we read together, is about God's people being different. And in the passage we read, we talked about shining like stars in the sky. You remember, that is the key verse in the whole of this letter. It was the springboard into studying this right at the very beginning of the book of Philippians, that we are to shine like stars in the universe, hence this image, as we hold out the word of life. So, we're returning back to this verse that began our series, but we have it now in its context, and that's what I want us to look at just now.

We're looking at what it means to shine as a Christian, to be different in a world that is crooked and warped. And really, that is what we are. That's what's really on Paul's heart as he writes this letter. He loves this church. It was founded in a short period of time on his second missionary journey. He had to leave. You remember, he'd been put in prison, and then he has to leave.

But he has this church in his heart, and he's constantly writing to them, or he's writing to them here, to say, stand firm, stand united, stand for the gospel. And we looked at this fairly recently about standing as one. And then also, standing united, don't be arguing or complaining, and so forth, show humility to each other, think of others. Last time, it seems a long time, it's been two weeks, I think, since I was here. It just seems an awful lot longer. But last time, we were looking at Philippians 2.13, and we were reminded that Christians are a work of God, that we are not just a decision that we made in our bedroom in 1952 or whatever, when we became a Christian, that God did a work in us, not just for us in the cross. And he gave us new life. We who were dead have been made alive.

We now have new will, a new desire to please him. This shows itself in holy actions, or it should. And we live a life to the glory of God. As Jesus lived his life for the glory of the Father, that is what motivates us. We are new creatures. It's as big as that. It's equal to the God who said, let there be light in the world, said, let there be light in John Lowry. And he's created new life within us. And this life has to be seen by others. And really, that's what we're looking at here.

[8 : 58] So, Paul has reminded them last time, you're God's workmanship, but work out your own salvation. Not work for it, but show that you are God's workmanship, and obedience and holiness. So, that's Paul's main thing here. He doesn't know if he's going to live or die. He's in prison.

So, he's writing to them, and he's anxious that they live a life worthy of the gospel, that they really reflect this. Now, when you come to verse 14, the passage that we're looking at this morning, he mentions a specific behavioral pattern that he's anxious that they don't show. He could have mentioned many things, but he mentions this, grumbling or complaining, or grumbling and arguing.

Arguing, verse 14, do everything without grumbling or complaining. Now, why does he mention those two things? Well, Paul is a Jew. He's an Old Testament scholar. He knows God's people of old. He knows his Old Testament. He knows that there is a tendency in God's people to grumble and complain. It is one of the first things that was noted when God's people come out of Egypt. They began to grumble and complain.

So, let's look at this together. Three points, then. First of all, here is a call to be different. A call to be different. And Paul, in his mind, he's remembering, he's saturated with the Old Testament.

So, his illustrations come from there. His thought patterns come from there, and rightfully so. And like Moses of old, he's anxious that God's people don't grumble and complain. Remember, there was a time Moses was told he won't enter the promised land. So, at the end of Deuteronomy, the book of Second Law, where the law is reiterated, he's anxious that they walk with the Lord, and that they don't grumble and complain, which they have a tendency to do. Let me remind you of Deuteronomy 31. And Paul's in a similar position. He might die, and he wants God's people in the New Testament to serve as to love the Lord and to walk with him and to be different. So, Deuteronomy 31, 26, take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God.

[11:23] There it will remain as a witness against you, for I know how rebellious and stiff-necked you are. If you had been rebellious against the Lord while I was still alive and with you, how much more will you rebel after I die? For I know that after my death you are sure to become utterly corrupt and to turn from the way I have commanded you. Now, Paul's not saying that they will do that, but he's anxious that they live a life worthy of the gospel, that they are to live as God's children. That's why I've given this sermon the title, Children of God. He mentions this phrase in here, that you may become blameless and pure children of God. In the Old Testament, they are very much the children of God.

And he's using this phrase, he's using this scenario, and he knows his history. And he's anxious that he might die, but that they might not turn away from following the Lord. And Moses viewed grumbling and complaining as very serious. Because when God's people grumbled and complained, and when God's people grumble and complain today, we show ourselves to be no different from the world. Our younger daughter really hates the news. She just, she never, every night, six o'clock, ten o'clock, it's the thing I do religiously, need to watch the news, something might have happened. And she really doesn't like what, because it's just moaning and complaining and sad stuff. And she just doesn't like watching. I say, well, you need to be aware of what's happening. But we live in a world of grumbling and complaining.

There's something within us that's never happy. And we know that we will never find true happiness and peace and joy unless we find it in Jesus. So unless people come to the Lord, they will always grumble and complain. But there's something within us, even as Christians, that this is a default condition that we keep going back to, grumbling and complaining. And Moses says in the next chapter, Deuteronomy 32, they, God's people, have acted corruptly towards him. To their shame, they are no longer his children, but a warped and crooked generation. That is the phrase that Paul borrows from Deuteronomy 32 when he writes this passage. Crooked and depraved, no longer his children. So Paul says, make sure you're God's children. Don't grumble and complain. That is a sign that you truly are a child of God. It's a serious thing. And God's people often complained about their hardship. In Numbers, you remember, now the people complained about their hardship in the hearing of the Lord. And when he heard them, his anger was aroused.

And you remember, the rabble with them began to crave other food. If only we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost, also the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now we have lost our appetite, and all we have left is this manna. I don't know about you, but I'm sure many of us have the tendency to, we don't like a lot. We grumble and we complain.

It used to be better then, but it's not so good now. And we do this. And when we do this, Paul is basically saying, you're just acting like the world. You're acting as if you're not the children of God. And it is serious. And that's how Paul describes the world. He describes Christian as blameless and pure, but the world we live in is warped and crooked. And that is the common characteristic of a warped and crooked generation, is we grumble and we complain. And Paul has basically said before, you're God's workmanship. If you're God's workmanship, you shouldn't be that type of person. Your sanctification is a process, but you shouldn't be this. It happened in Paul's day, in the

churches. Remember in Acts 6, amongst the deacons there, in those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews, among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. In the midst of this great work of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, you hear a church that's just moaning about food and grumbling. They're getting food. We're not getting food. This is racism or whatever. And they are complaining. It happens in churches today. It happens in churches then. There is something within us that does this. And it shouldn't be. So, that is what the children of God are like in the Old and New

[16:13] Testament. But Paul says, you are a child of God. And he gives us what, if we are to shine like stars, what that might look like. And it's not grumbling and not complaining that we would stand out. Look at verse 15. So that you may become, you don't, you're not spotless the minute you become a Christian.

Your sanctification is a process. But you're working towards being blameless and pure. Children of God, borrowed from the Old Testament, without fault, in a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine. That's the context of shining. Being a people who are different. Why is this so important? Why is it so important that we, in this one area of grumbling, complaining, that we don't do this, that we're pure, I remember in my Old Testament, one of the Old Testament lecturers commenting on why God chose the Jews. And I liked it because I was an engineer. And they talked about centripetal and centrifugal forces. Remember them? No, I can see it, blank. If you're on a wee roundabout in the play park or whatever, and you loved that when you were a kid, faster, faster, faster, faster, dad, and you're being thrown out, that is a centrifugal force. It will throw you off the—it's wanting to throw you off the roundabout. A centripetal force is a force that pulls you in. When God chose His people, and even today, He chose them in the Old Testament especially, that they would act as a centripetal force, that other nations would look at them and be drawn to them, be drawn to their God, to be impressed by their God, the God who loves them and cares for them, provides for them, and blesses them, and to give them that fear of missing out. Look at their God. Look at how good their God is. Instead, because they didn't walk with God, they acted in a centrifugal way. They repelled other nations. Well, I'm glad I'm not them. They're going into exile. They're being punished. I'm glad I'm not—their God just seems so scary.

It's the saddest thing. When our God is a loving, gracious God, but God's people can act in such a way, instead of attracting people to us, we repel. And that is what this is all about.

When we were clearing out our house, every time we've moved house, when the kids were growing up, I had a kite, and I've never seen this kite since I bought it, and I'd never seen it before. It's called UFO Sam, and I never throw it out because I just love it. It's a small kite. It's about this size, and it's kind of oval-shaped, and it's covered in silver foil or whatever, and it's very easy to fly. And when you fly it on a clear, sunny day, windy day, it flashes. It spins around, and the sun catches us. And what it does is folk come from various places to see what it is, and you see them looking up because they don't see it as a kite.

They just see this flashing thing. They know it's not a drone. They don't know what it is, and it attracts people. It's shining away. It's flashing away. That is what God's people are really supposed to be.

[19:48] We are supposed to be an impressive community that people see us, and they're attracted to our God. There is something different in us. Look, the guy, why are you dressed like that? It's intriguing.

I mean, Christians should live in such a way as we are to be different. After all, we are his workmanship. We were in Scotland taking a break from the wedding and driving by pottery places and so forth, and I'm thinking, well, some of these are nice. Look at that. You're supposed to hold it up and be attracted to it. It's nice. Christians are to be like this. I think we need to discover afresh the significance of the word, twinkle, twinkle, little star. How I wonder what you are. And we are supposed to be twinkle, twinkle, little stars, that when Christians or non-Christians come into our church, or day I say it, into our business meetings and dare to see something different. You're not like the world. You are different. You are shining. There is something impressive about you. How I wonder what you are. And that is really—that should be the case. That's not just a command. If we are God's workmanship, we are to strive to be pure and blameless, that people ask us about the hope that lies within us. Here is a call to be different, to shine. How do we shine?

By being blameless and pure, not grumbling and complaining. That's quite something, isn't it? And if you know the book of James, our tongue can cause so much damage before the Lord and before each other. And maybe even this week, maybe you're grumbling and complaining winter is coming, and so forth. Or you don't like your lot. We can be that type of person so easy. Here is a call. If we are God's workmanship, to be different. We must be different. God's people were to be different in the Old Testament to attract people to their God, and we are similar. We are God's workmanship better than any pottery that people want. We should hold each other up or hold ourself up and say, look at what God has done in my life. Secondly, in this passage, we also see a call to gospel ministry. Look at verse 16. We're not just to shine for the sake of it. We are to hold firmly either to the word of life or hold out the word of life. So, we're not just to be different. We are to—we're not just to shine ourself. We are to illuminate others. And that was how Jesus' ministry was described in Isaiah 9, verse 2. The people walking in darkness—this will be read at Christmastime—have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. Jesus comes as light, doesn't he? I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. Then John 8. Then Jesus spoke again to the people and said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. And then Jesus says to us, you are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. So, God's desire is not only that we are different, that we shine, that people are drawn to us, drawn to our God, and wonder about why we are different and we have the opportunity. But we are also to illuminate others. We are to hold out the word of life. We're to live as children of God, as children of light, that people, like my wee kite, they say, what is that? What is that? What is—who are you? Why are you so different? And the word that we are to hold out is the word of life. In him, Jesus was life, and that life was the light of men. Everyone who believes in me, Jesus says, has eternal life. You study the scriptures because you think you possess eternal life.

[24 : 09] These are the scriptures that testify about me. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. We are to tell people about Jesus, very simply. We are to tell people that is the word of life. He is light. He is life. So then, here is Paul facing death, and he's anxious about the believers, that their faith proves true, that they really are children of God, God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, for God's glory. He's anxious that they live a life that is pure and blameless. God is molding them and shaping them, and that they have a godly character and godly conduct. They are involved in telling others about Jesus, witnessing, holding out the word of life to others. Does that make sense? Lastly, a call to rejoice. If you see these things in others or even in yourself, that is something to rejoice in. Sadly, the people in the Old Testament were not a people to rejoice in. Moses' heart was broken. I know when I die, you're just going to go off the rails and so forth.

Instead of attracting others, you're going to repel them and so forth. But where you see them, it is something to rejoice. Look at verse 16. As you hold firmly to the word of life, and then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ, that I did not run or labor in vain. It's a strange section, isn't it? It's as if suddenly Paul wants to start boasting in himself. He says, so if you do this and you prove to be children of God, being this impressive community, I'll be able to boast. It's as if he's thinking, if you can do this, I wouldn't mind some brownie points here. That's not quite what he's saying here. He wants to—he's thinking once again of the Old Testament. And if you know your Old Testament, there were various sacrifices. There was one particular group of sacrifices, which were the sacrifices of a lamb. It was the main sacrifice, a lamb without blemish and spot and so forth. And that's what he sees their life as, this spotless sacrifice, sacrificed up to God, a spotless, pure and blameless sacrifice. And he sees his part in this as the drink offering that accompanied that sacrifice. Let me remind you of this in Numbers 28. The Lord says to Moses, give this command to the Israelites and say to them, see that you present to me at the appointed time the food for my offerings made by fire as an aroma pleasing to me. Say to them, this is the offering made by fire that you are to present to the Lord, two lambs a year old without defect as a regular burnt offering each day. Prepare one lamb in the morning and the other at twilight.

It says, this is the regular burnt offering instituted at Mount Sinai as a pleasing aroma and offering made to the Lord by fire. That is how Paul sees their service as like these two lambs, morning, evening, twilight, and so forth, as a pleasing aroma, their service to the Lord.

[27 : 35] And then he says, thinking of this other part, the Lord says in Numbers 27, 28 verse 7, the accompanying drink offering is to be a quarter of a hin of fermented drink with each lamb. Pour

out the drink offering to the Lord at the sanctuary. So, Paul has already seen his life as being poured out.

That's how he describes it in verse 17. I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, and I'm glad. In other words, he sees this part of the Old Testament sacrificial system being fulfilled in their ministry and in his contribution. In other words, I'm just a drink offering at the end poured out on your glad service. And he says, but if that's the case, and I see that you're living a life worthy of the gospel, pure and blameless, my wee bit just comes at the end, and I am rejoicing. He sees this, he's their sacrifice, and he rejoices. And so should you and I.

We should encourage each other, where we see each other doing well, walking in the Lord, and rejoice, and that that person should rejoice as well. Sometimes we're too quick to say, well, you know, it's not great, you could be better, and so forth. But to encourage each other in our service, in our work for the Lord, in our godly living. To be those people who are different. We are different here compared to a lot of people in Westerhailes. They're watching the telly, probably getting ready for the rugby this evening, and that's what they've got to look for. You're part of a small group. You're in God's, in the church this morning, and you are serving, you're worshipping, you're praising him.

But the acid test is Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, isn't it? Whether we are really those different people. Whether we grumble and complain. Whether we're never happy with the Lord's dealing with us or with our dealings with each other. And yet, if we are God's workmanship, we are called to be different. We are called to hold out the word of life. That others begin to inquire about the hope that we have. That we are salt and light. We are the light of the world. And if that's the case, then we should rejoice. We should rejoice we're doing well. We are making progress. We're shining as stars in the universe. We are growing in our faith. Over the next couple of weeks, Paul gives us an example, and he mentions a few good men. Timothy and Epaphroditus. Next week is our harvest service, but two weeks today, we'll pick up the first of them. He gives an example of what this looks like in a young man called Timothy, and we'll consider him in a fortnight's time. But let's bring our service to a close. As we stand and we sing, I, the Lord of sea and sky. This is quite an emotional song. In some ways, for Lucille and I, we came across this song when I left the church in Northern Ireland.

And unbeknown to us, they had a social thing, as they do, and they had a wee choir, a secret choir. We never had a choir. We've got a choir here. We never had a choir. But on that night, this choir magically appeared. And this was the song that either had just come out, but we'd never heard this before. And it was quite moving, because they knew we were going to Charlotte Chapel to their work in Nidre. And they sang this to us, and it was this call to gospel ministry. I'll never forget it, just the fact that they stood there and sang this, male, female, big, small, old, young. The whole congregation basically come up and they're like, wow, we've sat there like a couple of lemons. [31 : 36] But it was so powerful. As we sing this together, just reaffirming your heart that you want to be that person that shines, that person that's involved in evangelism, whatever that is, maybe even this week. You will meet people in darkness, people that don't have a clue, people that are lost and without hope. Just ask the Lord maybe to give you an opportunity, just to give an account for the hope that lies within you. We need those opportunities. Let's stand and we'll sing together.

Let's close in prayer. Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your work of grace in each one of our lives. Lord, who are we that you should choose us? We thank you, Father, for taking away our heart of stone and giving us a heart of flesh, placing a new song in our mouth, even praise to our God. We thank you in many ways we are that impressive people. But Father, we pray, Lord, as we seek opportunities to witness, we pray, Lord, that there might be that centripetal force in our life where it's not so much that we go out to tell others, but people cannot help but be drawn to us as they see something in us that causes us to shine. So, Father, we pray that we would walk worthy of the gospel, that we would have those opportunities to shine, to hold out the word of life, that you might be glorified. Lord, here we are afresh. Lord, use us, send us, cause us to shine even brighter in the days that lie ahead. We ask all these things, not just for our good, but for the glory of your name and the glory of your Son. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Thank you, folks.