

"BEING SHINING STARS"

Philippians 2:12-18

As we discussed last Sunday, the Apostle Paul wants the believers at Philippi to be united around a common purpose- having the mind of Christ which looks beyond the individual to the body of believers- the church. And we talked about the three-fold purpose of the church which is to: 1) worship God, 2) build up and equip the saints, and 3) spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. Now, Paul is admonishing the believers to "shine like stars in the world."

Let me ask you a question: do you want your life to count for something, after it is all said and done? Do you want to make a difference at least in one person's life by the time you cash in your chips?

I know I have referred to this movie in other sermons but it is such a good one to reflect on for the purpose of this sermon- that movie is one of my favorites and it is entitled: ***It's A Wonderful Life*** that stars that great Pennsylvanian from Indiana, Pennsylvania, Jimmy Stewart.

Maybe you remember, Stewart's movie character is George Bailey. George has these wonderful goals and dreams of going off to college and becoming a world traveler. But he ends up having to take over his daddy's business- a building and loans company, which operates more like a charity than a business. George becomes so discouraged in what he becomes that one night he decides to end it all. He says, "I wish I'd never been born." And it is at that moment that his guardian angel, Clarence Oddbody, Angel, Second Class, steps in and shows George what life would have been like had he never been born. His hometown of "Bedford Falls" would have become "Pottersville" and would have been named so after the greedy old banker. His old boss, the druggist, would have turned into the town drunk because George wouldn't have been there to stop him from making a fatal error in a prescription. In short, George touched many, many lives with his life.

So let me stop right here. I really think, deep down inside, all of us want to touch someone else's life. All of us want to be a little like George

Bailey and know that we mattered in this earthly life, that we made a difference in the lives of others. Don't we? I mean even if it is but one person that we touch, that we affect for the good? There is not a one of us who could not, who cannot make a difference.

Do you know that in 1645, one vote gave Oliver Cromwell control of England? That in 1649, one vote caused Charles I of England to be executed; that in 1845, one vote brought Texas into the union; that in 1868, one vote saved President Andrew Johnson from impeachment; that in 1876, one vote gave Rutherford B. Hayes the United States presidency; and that in 1923, one vote gave Adolf Hitler control of the Nazi party. Yes, we can make a difference, for the good or for the ill. We can be a positive influence, a shining star to someone or something else, if we want to.

The Apostle Paul tells us how we can make a difference in the life of someone else, in the life of the church. Let's see how.

First, **Paul tells us how to behave**. He says in verse 14, "Do all things without murmuring and arguing." In this verse Paul says to "do all things." It is important to note that the Christian life is about "doing." It isn't about sitting around and waiting to be waited on, it is about doing, serving, getting involved. We read in the book of James 1:22, "But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves." James also goes on to say that faith without works is dead. And I am sure we could go around to a lot of churches today and they should be conducting funerals for the living for they might be physically breathing, but spiritually there are those who are as dead as a door nail.

Paul goes on to say in verse 14 that we are to do all things how? "Without murmuring and arguing." Interesting the Greek word that Paul uses for murmuring- it is the word used of the rebellious murmurings of the children of Israel in the desert journey after they fled Egypt. And this word describes the low, threatening, discontented muttering of a mob who

distrusts their leaders and are on the verge of an uprising. And the word that Paul uses for arguing or another translation is "questionings" or "disputings" describes useless, and sometimes ill-natured, disputing and doubting.

I have heard some pastors complain about the complainers in their churches. They talk about people who are constant complainers. I mean, all of us have complaints, from time-to-time. I'm talking about people who are addicted to complaining. Paul challenges the believers in the Philippian church not to be complainers but difference makers- people who quickly move from identifying the problem, and not getting stuck on the problem, but searching and seeking and working towards a solution. Being a difference maker for Christ.

There is a story out there about an evangelist by the name of Baily Smith, who was said to have had a man in his church who never had a positive thing to say.

And so, in a business meeting one night, Rev. Smith called upon this man to pray but this is how he phrased it, "Brother so-and-so, would you please stand and lead us in a word of discouragement at this time." I guess that pastor was just willing to stick his neck out and call it like he saw it.

Friends, the antidote to what we are talking about is found in a five letter word- TRUST. Trust in God who is the great provider and sustainer. I guess the words of the Serenity Prayer are really appropriate for what we are talking about, that prayer that goes something like this- "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. The courage to change the things I can. And the wisdom to know the difference."

Second, **Paul speaks to the issue of character**. In verse 14 he tells the believer to be, "blameless, innocent, without blemish." What Paul is talking about is Christian purity. And being pure is not a real popular word today because that person could be labeled a "goody too shoes," a "do-gooder." Paul wants the believer to be the real deal, to be genuine.

Friends, our lives are like open books for all to see. What is our book telling the world? Many of you know the name Phil Donahue, the one-time popular TV talk show host. Phil had a reputation for giving clergy a hard time, and his reason was that he had little respect for us guys and gals. He felt most clergy would do anything for some media attention. Well, in his autobiography, he tells about an encounter with a pastor who was different. It was when Phil was a young TV reporter in our beloved state of Ohio. One day he was sent to wild, wonderful West Virginia in the bitter cold of winter to cover a mine disaster. He went by himself in a battered little car, carrying a minicam to film the story. It was so cold when he got there, however, that the camera wouldn't work. So he put it inside his coat to warm it up so that it could run. In the meantime the families of the trapped miners were gathered around. They were just simple mining people—women, old men, and children. Several of the trapped men were fathers. Then the local pastor arrived. He was rough-hewn, and he didn't speak well

at all. But he gathered all the families around in a circle, and they held one another in their arms while he prayed for them. As this was going on, Donahue was still trying to get his camera to work, and he was incredibly frustrated because he couldn't film the poignant scene. Finally, after the prayer was over, Donahue managed to get his camera to work. So he told the pastor he had his camera working now and asked if the pastor would please do the prayer again so he could film it for the evening news.

Donahue says, by the way, that he's been with the world's best-known public figures, including preachers, and they're all willing to redo a scene in order to get on the news. This simple West Virginia preacher, however, told Donahue, "Young man, we don't pray for the news. I'm sorry, but we've already prayed, and I will not pose." To this day Donahue remembers that pastor with respect. You don't forget that kind of character, no matter who you are or what you believe. (Jay Kesler, *Being Holy, Being Human*)

And third, **Paul speaks of the context of our Christian living.** Paul says in verse 15 that, "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation," we are to live like what? Like shining stars. Paul is calling it like it is, and we can likewise, do the same. Just like back in Paul's day the generation was crooked- which speaks of moral evil and it was perverse- which speaks of a twisted nature. Times have changed but people haven't. And so just like for Paul, the perverse generation is a reality- it is intimidating and threatening, it is even inviting and seductive. But the people of God back then, as well as today, are not just to survive, but we are to take the bull by the horns, we are to take the initiative and be shining stars in a dark world. It is easy to become defensive, let alone react to this world in which we live. But as disciples of Christ we are to be salt and light, we are to shine as stars, we are to be the Church of Christ and react, respond in a way befitting our name- Christian, in the way that Christ would respond. For Christ was a servant on behalf of the world.

For as we read last week in our passage, and, if you just look to Philippians 2:5-8, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."

Be the shining star that Christ calls us to be- be a difference maker for Him- in your family, in this church, in your neighborhood, in this city. Do it for Christ. You can, I can, we all can- do it for Christ. Amen.

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Introduction: Do you want your life to count for something? Do you want to make a difference?

It's A Wonderful Life- starring Jimmy Stewart who plays George Bailey
George: "I wish I'd never been born"

The Apostle Paul tells us how we can make a difference...

First, **Paul tells us how to** _____ vs. 14
"Do all things" James 1:22

How are we to do "all things?"

The antidote is a five letter word- _ _ _ _ _

Second, **Paul speaks to the issue of** _____ vs. 14

And third, **Paul speaks of the** _____ **of our Christian living** vs. 15

"In the midst of a crooked and perverse generation" we are to live like what?

Conclusion: Be the shining star that Christ calls us to be- be a difference maker for Him- in your family, in this church, in your neighborhood, in this city.