

**Title:** Therefore! Be stars in the Universe

**Scripture:** Philippians 2.12-18

**Theme:** We are called to shine like stars in the universe, rolling back the darkness that pervades this world. That comes at a price. In rolling back the darkness, there are times more often than not where we are standing in stark contrast to this world.

**Introduction:**

G.K. Chesterton, the early twentieth century writer and Philosopher was quoted once as saying: "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried."

This is what worldly people and at times the church lives like. We find within cultural Christianity that the life we choose to live in is one of comfort. Comfort within ourselves and comfort within society. Seldom taking on the deep challenges of loving this world and yet facing down the darkness that rules it. Cultural Christianity gives us a cheap grace that has no power to shine light into dark places. True Christianity we will find today is much different. Before we look at our passage today in Philippians, I would like to read a Psalm. One of the ascent psalms that would have been read in Jesus Day as the Passover festival approached. If you would please stand.

**Psalm 121:**

*I lift up my eyes to the mountains---where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip---he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you---the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm---he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.*

**Pray - Lord's Prayer**

Pastor Roland brought us a very powerful message last week setting the groundwork for the rest of chapter two in Philippians. In between services I leaned over to him and whispered: "you brought a powerful, convicting and awesome message, but you left me with the, 'Therefore...'" He smiled and said: "Therefore." Most everyone knows the rule of thumb when reading anything, scripture in particular- When there is a therefore, you best find out what it is there for! That today is our challenge as we step into the third week of Lent and our journey through Philippians and the Good News. I pray that you all are taking time during these forty days to set aside a portion of your day to read, meditate and pray. This is a time that we can reset in a very busy and trying time in our world. For me, it reminds me of who really is in charge. The only way we can become co-sufferers with Christ is to get a hold of the heart and mind of God in a way we never

have before. By doing so, we will be able to love even those who hate us (no simple task) and stand in the gap for those who have no idea that one exists. Becoming co-restorers of the image of God as Pastor shared last week.

In 1939, six years after Adolph Hitler took power in Germany things within the church had gone from bad to worse. The Lutheran Church of Germany had decided that their job was to follow the dictates and edicts of the State and had progressively moved away from the Gospel. It was during this time that Dietrich Bonhoeffer and some other theologians established what became known as the Confessing Church. He established the seminary at Finkenwalde where young seminarians would go and be taught the truths of scripture as well as the fundamentals of living within community. It was here also where he penned *Life Together* and *Prayerbook of the Bible* as well as his most famous work: *Discipleship*. From 1933 to 1939 the State Church became more and more Nazified and was seeing Hitler as something that he wasn't. What had become known as the "Reich Church" issued the Godesberg Declaration. In effect what this said was that National Socialism was a natural continuation of the works of Martin Luther, and that the "Christian faith" was incompatible with Judaism. Thus the Church would become what the prevailing culture decided it should be for that time. Failing in its primary mission of holding up the truths of Scripture as light against the the dark forces which would see it either change what it said or suffer the consequences.

Once this occurred, conscription into the army seemed inevitable, Bonhoeffer became very concerned. He feared that his personal convictions and decisions related to his being a "conscientious objector" would have an adverse effect on his friends within the Confessing church. So he began to look for a way to leave Germany. Thus putting into motion an effort to get him out of the country before Germany made it impossible. It worked, and in mid-1939 Bonhoeffer boarded a ship bound for New York to serve as the pastor for German refugees in New York as well as Professor of Theology at Union College and Columbia. If the story ended there it seems all would have ended well for one of the brightest theologians and deep thinkers of the twentieth century.

It didn't though. Upon arrival in New York, Bonhoeffer wrestled even more with his decision to leave Germany for the safety of the States while his fellow Germans were suffering. He also knew what very few Germans knew at the time, how beyond belief the mass killing of Jews had become. What makes his next decision so incredible is the comment made within the recommendation letter to bring him to the states by Reinhold Niebuhr. "...If Union didn't make room for him, we will likely end up in a concentration camp." Yet at thirty three years of age Dietrich Bonhoeffer made the decision that would change his life. He wrote to Niebuhr after only three weeks in New York:

*"I have had time to think and pray about my situation and that of my nation and to have God's will for me clarified. I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I shall have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share in the trials of this time with my people. My brothers in the Confessing Church, they may have been right in urging me*

*to do so; but I was wrong in going. Such a decision each man must make himself. Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make that decision in security."* -Dietrich Bonhoeffer: July 1939

He decided to shine like a star in the universe. This week we are looking at the 'therefore' portion of chapter two. Pastor Roland took a great deal of time helping us to see the Creator's journey in that beautiful poem at the beginning of this chapter. The challenge for us comes when we have to take ownership of being like Jesus. What does that mean? What does it look like? Finally what does 'Shining like Stars in the universe' really cost?

Paul launches right into the task at hand with that word therefore. It's there we begin to really get a sense of what we need to do within ourselves and within the culture and wider world as we walk out the Creator's journey. I say that because Paul is linking the first eleven verses of this chapter regarding what Jesus did and what he gave up directly to us and how we are to move forward in our world. That is what the therefore is there for. So let's dig in:

*Therefore, my dear friends, 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, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. 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 the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.* Philippians 2.12-16 NIV

Paul gives us a few verses that many of us are familiar with, some we like and some we don't. Working out our salvation with fear and trembling. That doesn't sound real encouraging. However, he finishes that statement with: 'for it is God who works in you.' That means we are not alone. We have a helper, the Holy Spirit. Our job is to be obedient to Him. Doing everything without complaining or grumbling. How many of you struggle with doing life this way? No complaining, no grumbling. We have mastered this art. Yet we are called to shine like stars, to be different.

### **1-What does it mean?**

Who noticed the moon this week? I woke up Monday morning about 1:30am and really thought that we had left the lights on outside. When I moved the shade aside I realized that the moon was almost full and as bright as the sun. No matter how dark that night was, wherever the light of the moon shone, darkness was overcome. John tells us in the first few verses of his gospel:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1.1-5 NIV*

This is what we are called to be. Paul tells us to shine like stars in the sky into a world that is full of darkness. Jesus made clear that we are not to hide or shy away from shining that light. In the Sermon on the Mount we find Jesus telling his disciples this:

*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5.14-16 NIV*

In the culture we live in today the call to separate what we believe from what we do in our work-a-day world is very loud. It's often said that we need to keep our faith quiet, private and away from our work place, our school and even the market place. Believe what you want to believe, just don't tell anyone. But that's the culture's story. That is not God's story. God's story is one of shining light into the dark places of this world in order to restore that marred image and the marred creation. In order to roll back the darkness we have to enter darkness and light the room. How does a dark room get light? You go in and light a candle or flick the switch. Action is required on our part. We are not called to stand idly by while darkness continues to rule. We have to be different. Now different doesn't mean freakishly weird or anti-social Christians. But our lifestyle needs to reflect the light of Christ into the world. Bonhoeffer in his book *Life Together* talks about how and where we are to be lights:

*"The Christian cannot simply take for granted the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies (where darkness lived)- In the end all his disciples abandoned him. On the cross he was alone, surrounded by criminals and the jeering crowds. He had come for the express purpose of bringing peace to the enemies of God. So, Christians, too, belong not in seclusion of the cloistered life, but in the midst of enemies. (where darkness is) There they find their mission, their work." -Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Life together pg.27*

We cannot be light unless we go into darkness. It is then that we shine but:

## **2-What does it look like?**

Well for starters it will always seem to look counterintuitive. Paul toward the end of his freedom, was trying to get back to Jerusalem with an offering for the church there. In Acts 20 I find some interesting things. In verse 13 I found something that while simple on the surface helped me to understand the rest of the chapter and beyond.

*We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. Acts 20.13 NIV*

Luke being Luke never waste words and he says here that Paul made arrangements for all but him to sail. I believe that it is here where Paul was beginning to get a sense of what the cost was going to be as he stood in opposition to the darkness of the world. In the rest of this chapter we see a Paul who is resolute in his task. All of a sudden he seemed to be in a hurry. They stopped only where necessary because Paul was on a mission. He needed to, if at all possible, get back to Jerusalem by Pentecost.

When they landed at Miletus he sent for the elders of Ephesus and spoke to them. There is a change in Paul's addressing of them. Its a farewell speech, a reflective moment with some of his closest friends. I believe that Paul was spoken to by the Holy Spirit and he was working out all that was needed to move forward.

This is one of the tough parts of working out our salvation with fear and trembling. Why do I say that? It's clear here that Paul has been given his assignment and it was a journey into darkness where I am sure he was uncertain and uneasy of all that was to come. When the Creator God calls us, he calls all of us. Not just parts of us and certainly not always to comfortable places. Paul finally tells them:

*And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me---the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace. Acts 20.22-24 NIV*

Often the Creators journey first needs to be taken alone in the solitary moments of reflection and prayer. Getting a hold of God to find out what he is asking of us. Both Paul and Bonhoeffer journeyed alone. Paul on foot and Bonhoeffer by boat across the Atlantic. Both of them wrestling with what God truly wished them to do. It was there where they heard The Lord and from that moment on they were steadfast in their journey.

The response they got from the Holy Spirit was clear. It was not about simply keeping the darkness at bay. It is about rolling back the darkness and overcoming it completely. Often times the darkness that must be overcome first is that which we find in ourselves. Fear, doubt, anger, insecurity, feeling inadequate and not up to the task, whatever that task may be- all need to be given over to God. In overcoming the darkness, what are you afraid of? Where in your life does the light of Christ have a hard time getting to? Where do you feel as though you will never measure up to the task? You see, Paul was headed to Rome, but that didn't mean he wasn't concerned. Bonhoeffer was headed back to Germany and he too had his concerns. Both knew what the potential outcome of their obedience meant. They went anyway.

Tackling these things is what it looks like when we are working out our salvation. No wonder it is with fear and trembling. In doing so we SHINE! Because the giving over of these things to God allows his light to shine in and through us. Then with our fears in check and given over to God we can join him in the journey of helping to restore this dark world. This is no easy road. Jesus never said it would be. The elders in Ephesus didn't understand Paul anymore than those of the Confessing Church and in America when Bonhoeffer decided he must return home. There are times when the only thing worse than being misunderstood is being a leader who is misunderstood. We have to realize that at times in order for the truth of the Gospel not to be left behind for the sake of our comfort, a stand will need to be taken. Paul wasn't in prison for selling cupcakes, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer wasn't in jail because he said nice things about the evil that had overtaken his country. Looking like and shining like stars does have a cost.

### **3-What's the cost?**

Here is the hard part for us all. We overlook certain things that we see in Scripture which make us uncomfortable. Sometimes we feel they do not apply to us or we don't want them to. The darkness that we are to overcome is quite content to allow a culturally conforming and comfortable Christianity. One that costs people little by way of conviction. It is really no threat at all, because it is powerless and weak. The truth and power of the Gospel as Thomas Cahill states: *"...is to bring comfort to the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable."*

Paul said in Philippians chapter two verse five:

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.*  
Philippians 2.5 NIV

With that as our reference point for reading what comes next a couple of very uncomfortable things come out here in the poem of our Creator's journey.

*...rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death---even death on a cross!* Philippians 2.7-8 NIV

Paul ends the first chapter with these words:

*For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.* Philippians 1.29-30

These are not comfortable statements. There is a cost, and that cannot be avoided if we really wish to understand what Paul is writing. As much as Philippians is a book of joy in the midst of a tough time for Paul, let's remember he was in jail. It is a letter of how we

shine like stars through suffering with and for Christ. He suffered for us. We were bought at a very high price. We can do no less for him. Sometimes that suffering is dying to ourselves in obedience to God. Area's like our finances. Can we trust that he will do much more with 90% than we could with 100%? Do we believe that if he takes care of the sparrow he will more than care for us? Do we trust him in our relationships? Our jobs? Do we trust that when he calls us to something he will qualify us for the task? Can we give that addiction over to him so that he can create in us that restored image? Not all of us will have to pay with our lives or do prison time. Let's not be fooled however. We are imprisoning ourselves if we aren't giving to God the things he's asking us to. Either way we look at it, taking the Creator's journey of restoration means dying to ourselves at some level. Paul was very comfortable with that. The last two verses that we will see today from chapter two say this:

*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.* Philippians 2.17-18 NIV

Sometimes we are called to take a very uncomfortable stance. The culture makes it seem like we are standing alone, but we aren't. The Holy Spirit, our helper is always there with us. In order to shine we have to face down the darkness. This will bring opposition. If you don't think so, just try facing down something in your life that you struggle with. How easy is that to let go? It's not! Only two things can be done with light: it can shine or it can be snuffed out. We know that eventually the Roman Empire had enough of Paul. He was beheaded sometime around 64 AD. Yet here we stand, with the words he penned to the church in Philippi, learning to shine like stars. And the Roman empire is but dust.

The last sermon Dietrich Bonhoeffer ever preached was held in Flossenbug prison. It was Easter Sunday 1945. His topic: The Resurrection of Christ. That same week he, much like the Apostle Paul was silenced on the gallows. His last words, remembered by the commander of the camp while standing shivering in the cold waiting: "Are you scared Bonhoeffer?" He was asked. His reply: "No sir, just cold." -A light in a dark place.-

### **Closing:**

So where do you need to shine? Where are you struggling? This Lenten season is a time for us to reflect and reset. To seek God and find him. Are you being challenged in areas and ways you haven't before? As we end today I am opening the altar again this week. How many candles does it take to light a dark room? Only one. A tiny flame overcomes the darkness. I want to challenge you today. I have two candles up here that I lit at the beginning of the service. In the basket are tea lights. If there is an area of darkness in your life, a place where you need the light of Christ to shine, come up, take a candle, light it and proclaim to the darkness- NO MORE. I belong to the King, the son of the Creator of the universe.

The prayer team will be here as well if you desire someone to pray with you. If you just wish to rest here in quietness before The Lord I urge you to do so. So come. If you are afraid to come alone, bring a friend-as we will learn this week, this is not a journey that we need take alone.

Paul in his letter to the Church at Ephesus said this:

*And that about wraps it up. God is strong, and he wants you strong. So take everything the Master has set out for you, well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way. This is no afternoon athletic contest that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels. Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation are more than words. Learn how to apply them. You'll need them throughout your life. God's Word is an indispensable weapon. In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out. Ephesians 6.10-18*  
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