



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Philippians 2: 12-18

2013

"Shining In The Dark"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Mark, and good morning. We're in Philippians chapter 2. Philippians chapter 2, looking at verses 12 through 18,

¹²So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

¹⁴Do all things without grumbling or disputing; ¹⁵so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, ¹⁶holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. ¹⁷But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. ¹⁸You too, *I urge you*, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.

Philippians 2: 12-18

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we do thank You for this time together: And what a privilege it is to be able to read the Scriptures as we have, to possess this Word—the words of life, really. And You've given them to us. You've opened our hearts to receive the Gospel, and You have given us Your revelation, and we have the ability, with new minds, with spiritual eyes and ears to comprehend the meaning of Your Word. We recognize the value of it; but the world doesn't—it dismisses it as nothing. And yet, this is a great treasure to possess, the Scriptures, the inerrant Word of God. What a blessing and a privilege.

Help us to know that and to rejoice in the passage that we have before us. Every passage of Scripture is great, and it is true. You read a passage of Scripture and you think, 'That is my favorite verse'...And then you read another one the next day, or the next week, and you say, 'No, that's my favorite verse.' It's all wonderful because it's all from You. This book is unique; it's Your revelation; and You give us eyes to see it and ears to hear it. You've given us the ability to understand it—and not only that, You've put within our hearts the Holy Spirit to interpret it for us, and guide us in our thinking.

And so as we study this great text, it reminds us of Your work within our hearts; gives us our responsibilities, (sets them before us), but informs us that we can do it because, 'You are "at work" within us.' May the Spirit of God teach us these things and open our hearts to receive them.

So we look to You to bless us, LORD. We pray for His ministry, that it will go unhindered, that we'll be submissive to it, and that we won't quench the Spirit, that we will be yielded to Him. Do that work within us, Father.

We pray for ourselves because we're reminded of an amazing fact; and that is that 'we are lights'. And so as we go out from here, we're to shine. Help us to do that, LORD. May the time we spend in Your Word this morning encourage us to do that, and teach us how to do that. And may the Spirit of God, through the ministry of Your Word, kindle within each of us a hunger, and desire, and resolve to shine.

So LORD, we look to You to bless us. Bless us as we sing our next hymn, prepare our hearts for this time of study; and may it be not only a time of study but a time of worship as well. We thank You for Christ. It's in His name we pray. Amen.

(Message) When you read through the New Testament you find a number of descriptions of Christians and the church—not all of them, really, very flattering. ‘We are sheep’, which preachers like to say are ‘stupid animals’. Paul tells us that, ‘We are not many wise or mighty or noble. We are the foolish things of the world, the weak things of the world.’ (1Cor 1:26-27). And all of that is true. So, it's a little surprising to read that ‘Christians are lights.’ But that's what Paul calls us in Philippians chapter 2, in verse 15, “...you appear as lights in the world.”

What is light? Well, it's been described in different ways, and really, very different ways. It's been described as *particles* and it's been described as *waves*. I'm not sure what light is—but I know what it does: It gives life and illumination; nothing lives without light; no one sees without light.

Light is one of God's greatest blessings to the creation—and it's the first one that He gave. His first command was, “Let there be light.” (Gen 1:3). And what God gave, when He gave light, was a particular kind of light; He gave us white light. It contains the colors of the rainbow; and because of it, there is beauty in this world.

Imagine a world without white light. There would be no color, (at least not color as we know it). No blue sky, no red apples, the grass would not be green. There would be, largely I guess, just shades of gray. So what an amazing metaphor to use of the Christian. We “appear as lights in the world.” Our words, our lives convey life, and truth, and beauty in abundance.

So the question we have to ask ourselves as we come to this text and we read that statement that Paul makes about us is, ‘Are we shining? Are we doing that? Are we living as lights?’

The Philippians weren't, or at least, (and that may be a bit harsh), they were not glowing as they should. Their glow had dimmed a bit. There were problems in Philippi;

the kind of problems that every church has, the kind of problems that every relationship has. There were divisions among them. There was infighting.

So before Paul could encourage them to shine, he had to convince them to unite. That requires something very hard; it requires humility and selflessness. Paul's great concern here in this letter is unity—unity in the church. But for there to be unity, there must be humility. And to encourage that, he gave the example of Christ, who left heaven to become a man and die for us.

It was the greatest act of condescension, "He humbled Himself", Paul said. (Phl 2:8). And that is the attitude Paul hoped that the Philippians would have, that they would put others ahead of themselves, that they would live selfless lives as Christ did. Well he makes that application in verse 12. "So then," he writes, (meaning in light of all of this, in light of this example of Jesus Christ), 'imitate Him.' That's the idea in the words, "...work out your salvation with fear and trembling." (12b).

Now it's important to note, Paul does not say, 'Work for your salvation with fear and trembling', but "...work out your salvation". Salvation can't be achieved. It is the gift of God that can only be received through faith. And what this statement about 'working out our salvation' presumes is that the salvation is there to begin with. Once it has been received, once it is there, once we are saved, it can be 'worked out' in a person's life; it can be manifested in a person's life by practicing it in both 'thought and deed.'

'Thought' first because it affects our conduct, which means living out the life of Christ in our minds and in our actions—imitating Him. That's the life the Christian has been given, the life of Christ; New life. We are different from what we were when we entered into this world. We're not the same people. If we're believers in Jesus Christ, a transformation has taken place. We're different. We've been changed.

We're a 'new creation.' That's what Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, in verse 17. New people, different people. God has changed us—and He is still changing us. He is still working with us. He's sanctifying us. He's transforming us. He's

changing us continually into the image of Christ. That's the standard. That's the model, and that's how He's shaping us. And so that's what's to be taking place in our life.

Paul says that's what he was working to achieve in the lives of the Galatians. He says that he was laboring with them to have "Christ formed" in them. (Gal 4:19). Paul was in labor with them, and they were to be in labor with themselves. We are to be in labor with ourselves, to conform ourselves to the image of Christ, and have His likeness in us—to become like Him.

Well, from what we've seen in the great example that Paul has given in the previous passage, that requires obedience to the will of God. That's certainly what Christ gave; He gave obedience to God, unto death, even death on a cross. And that doesn't come through passivity; that doesn't come by leading a passive, non-active life. That comes through great activity; that comes through effort. And that requires discipline, especially in this matter of humility and service—that of putting others first.

That's the main feature of Christ's likeness, as Paul sets it forth, as he gives us the example of Christ in the previous verses. He sacrificed Himself for us, not in some mechanical way, but genuinely out of love, out of true affection for us. His love is pure. His love is not dependent on our affection. It is apart from that. He loves us in our weakness and our sin. We failed Him continually. We fail Him daily. We fail Him hourly. We are constantly failing, and yet He still loves us and cares for us. And our failure doesn't diminish His love for us in the least. He doesn't measure His love by our returns, by our response, by what we give Him. —He simply loves us.

And that is motivation for us to do what He does. He is motivated to live as He does out of an unconditional love—and that's the kind of love we're to have. Those are the kind of people we're to be. We are to love the LORD, who loves us infinitely. And therefore we are to love His people, whom He loves.

Cultivating that character, developing Christ's life in us; His mind, His conduct, is 'working out our salvation', working out, manifesting, what is already there—the salvation that's there. And the way we do that is by seeing Him in Scripture and

reflecting on His revelation in the Word of God. That's 2 Corinthians chapter 3, in verse 18 where Paul explains, (to put it very simply), 'as you see Him in Scripture the Spirit of God takes what you're seeing, nourishes your soul, and conforms you to that image. As we study, and reflect, and think about Him, we're transformed.'

Now that's a lifelong effort. And it's not a smooth effort; it's full of failures and setbacks. We are engaged in a struggle with the world, the flesh, and the devil; but we're certainly engaged in a struggle with the flesh. We're engaged in a struggle with our own self and the sin that's in us. Paul talks about that in Romans chapter 7, 'the principle of sin' that's *within* him, that *frustrates* him. (vs21). He speaks about it in the Book of Galatians, in chapter 5, the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. That's the Christian life. That's the battle that we face, but it's what we're to be doing. We're to be dealing with that, and seeking to be obedient to the Lord God. But it's not easy.

So recognizing that, recognizing the difficulty, recognizing the great challenge of what Paul is teaching them here and urging them to do, he leads up to that command with some very encouraging words. He calls them "beloved", (vs12), and then reminds them of their pattern of obedience—for he has seen it. This was a remarkable young church, a small church, an obedient church, and he reminds them of that, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation..." (vs12).

Now that's very instructive, (and this is almost said as an aside), but Paul knew the best way to get the best out of people. He didn't use his apostolic authority in some heavy handed way and give them some stern command or threat of some penalty if they didn't obey—he used encouragement. The proverbs tell us that 'A gentle tongue can break a bone.' (Pro 25:15). And Paul used *gentle* but genuine words to persuade the Philippians to follow his counsel. They had a history of being obedient; and so he's telling them, 'Continue in that. You're an obedient people—be obedient!' There's always room for improvement on our obedience.

We can always become more obedient, and that's what he's saying. They've been obedient, they're to continue to be obedient. They are a people who are loved greatly, loved by Paul, loved by the Lord God, and so they were to love. They were to love one another—and they do that by being helpful.

Last week I quoted the Princeton theologian, Benjamin B. Warfield and the article that he wrote. (I didn't give you the title of it, but the title of the article from which I quoted was *"Imitating the Incarnation"*.) And it's an exposition of this passage we looked at last week in Philippians 2; of Christ "emptied Himself", (vs7), and it is about what happened at the incarnation. Basically, what it is, He humbled Himself; He left the glories of heaven to become a man in order to serve us. And Warfield is saying, "Imitate that." Imitate that great act of humility and selfless service.

And then he gives an example of how that's to be done. He said, (and what I quoted last week was), "Wherever men suffer, there will we be to comfort. Wherever men strive, there will we be to help. Wherever men fail, there will we be to uplift. Wherever men succeed, there will we be to rejoice." And he said something like, "We bind ourselves to a thousand souls." That's how we do it, by being helpful men and women. And that is Christlike—that is what is to be cultivated in us. That's what we are to seek to become. That is what it is to 'work out our salvation', to work out the life of Christ in our character and conduct.

But it is not a natural thing to do. Human nature is against that. Human nature is for exalting self. In fact human nature, pride, has its subtle ways of producing in all of us resentment and jealousy so that not even our Lord's example and words of gentle persuasion can cause us to act in genuine loving service.

But then God's will and purpose are never dependent on us. We're dependent on Him, completely. And really, that's the encouragement. That's the encouragement that encourages us to do the very things that Paul is saying, and the reason we can.

And he gives that encouragement, that great encouragement in verse 13. Paul explains that the Lord is with us constantly to enable us to follow His will. "Work," he

said. Do that. You must do that. "Work out your salvation for", (and here's the reason you can do it), "God is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure. (vs13).

Now that's the key. It's not in us. If we are candid about our condition and really understand ourselves, we know that we are incapable of living for others, sacrificially from the heart. Now we can comply to that outwardly, but not with selfless love. Our affections, our will, it's all "curved in on self", as Luther said. We can do things for ourselves, but by nature we cannot be the selfless people that we're exhorted to be here. But while we can't do that in our own strength and our own ability we can do it, for we can do all things in Christ. We can do all things through the Holy Spirit and the power that He gives. That's the encouragement that Paul gives here.

God is at work in us, constantly giving us the ability to live for Him, giving us the ability to serve one another, to be united in the cause of the Gospel to the glory of God. He's constantly at work within us. We are a new creation. In the new birth, God has given to us a new heart, He's given us a new mind, He's given us a new will.

But the fact is, without the work of the Holy Spirit within us, we will not function. The Greek word that's used here, that Paul uses for "work", is *energeó*. And you can sense some familiarity with that word. It's the word from which we get 'energy'. That's what the Holy Spirit is doing. For God is the one working in you, energizing you. That's what Paul is saying, He is both the energy and the energizer. And without Him, we can't function. We have faculties that are new and are necessary, but they don't function apart from the work of God.

I can give you an example. This morning, after the first service, a couple of deacons were talking and said, "Well, you got the air conditioner working." And I asked, "Was there a problem?" "Yeah, the storm caused a power surge, and knocked it out temporarily." It's a new system, and it's an excellent system; but if the energy is not being supplied, if the electricity's not there, it doesn't function.

You can have a 'state of the art' computer, maybe some of you do, and you're working along, and, (one of the most frustrating things, I know from experience, is to be

working along...), and suddenly there's a power outage—and things are lost. And the thing's gone, and the lights flicker, and the computer's off. Well, it's a 'state of the art' computer, but it doesn't function at all if there's no electricity—if there's no power coming through it. And that's true with us, personally.

God has given every believer in Jesus Christ the equipment—but the power is from Him, which means we're constantly dependent on the Spirit for everything. And the encouraging thing also is, it never stops. There's no interruption. He doesn't cease leading us. He's constantly with us, constantly supplying us with the energy, with the faith.

The example that Jesus gave in John 15, (the example of the vine and the branches), the branch doesn't produce any fruit when it's by itself. It has to be in the vine to produce fruit. And He's the vine, we're the branches. In Him we produce "much fruit", He said. (vs5). Apart from Him we can do nothing. We are in Him. We are joined to His life. He is at work in us, energizing us, giving us understanding, causing a change in our lives, a change in our character, a change in our wills; and He's producing change in conduct as a result of that. So Paul tells them, (and tells us), 'In light of all of that'... "Work!" And we can work because God is working in us.

When Augustin understood this truth, he made it a prayer that he wrote in his *Confessions*. I've quoted it many times, but it's an excellent prayer. He prayed, "Give what You command, and command what You will." In other words, 'I can do whatever You command me to do, LORD. I can be obedient. I can love others as I'm supposed to love them. I can love them willingly and sacrificially. I can do all of that if You give the ability, if You give the power, if You supply the energy.'

And He does do that. That's what Augustin was praying for. 'LORD, give me the ability to do the things that You've commanded me to do, and I'll do them. I can't do it apart from that.' And that's how we're to pray; that's what we're to look for. 'He's at work in us', Paul says, 'both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.'

"His good pleasure" is what? Well, His good pleasure is forming Christ in us. And He's going to accomplish that. He will give what He commands. That is encouraging—it's greatly encouraging. The almighty power of God is at work in us. Are you a believer in Jesus Christ? God lives within you. The Spirit of God lives within you. He's sealed your heart. He is constantly supplying you with the power of God. So we should get working; we should be living for Him and living a life of obedience. And as we do that, as we walk by faith, we will see His life in our life and experience His enabling power. That's how we live, by faith, and we witness His power within us.

In verse 14, Paul gives some specific guidance on how we should do that, how we're to live our life. Maybe we should say, 'how we shouldn't live it', because he gives it in the negative. He says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing." That is a problem. It's always been a problem for God's people, grumbling and disputing. We know that from Israel.

We learn a great deal from the Children of Israel. And that's one thing we learn about ourselves from what we see in them. Grumbling was characteristic of them out there in the wilderness. In fact, they started grumbling before they ever got in the wilderness. They started grumbling before they ever got out of Egypt. God brought them to the Red Sea. And there they were: The Red Sea was before them, the army of Pharaoh behind them. They were shut in. They didn't see any way of deliverance and they began to complain.

They'd already witnessed God's power in Egypt, how He crushed the gods of Egypt—and He had proven in the nine plagues that He is God. But this was a new obstacle, and they didn't think there was any way to be delivered from it. And then God parts the Red Sea, brings them into the wilderness—and they rejoice! They sing hymns and then...they start grumbling again. And grumbled for 40 years.

Now look, life was hard there; it was a desert where sand gets into everything, where it is hot in the day and it's cold at night, where there are snakes and scorpions,

and there are no amenities. Moses called it "the great and terrible wilderness" that God led them through. (Deu 8:15).

But that's the key. That's the important thing to know; God led them into that wilderness, and He led them through it. He was always with them and always providing for them. They lacked nothing, even in the wilderness. Food, water, clothing, everything was provided for them—provided for them miraculously.

And He will do the same; and is doing the same for us because we, too, are walking through a wilderness. We're pilgrims in this world. We're on a journey to a different country, a heavenly country. This isn't our home. And in the midst of this wilderness, this hostile place, He provides.

Look, life in this world is not easy. It's not easy for the Christian. Don't expect it to be easy. It's not. It's hard. It's full of challenges. But the LORD is with us, and leading us. He governs our lives. He determines things. He does—not men, or chance, or circumstances. He has freed us from spiritual slavery and He is bring us through the desert of this world to a heavenly land.

So Paul forbids complaining, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing" because that is unbelief. It denies the LORD's control, it denies the LORD's wisdom, it denies His providence. It's unbelief—and it's contagious. It only aggravates the problem and turns people against each other.

He gives the reason for the warning in verse 15. He wanted them, "to be blameless and innocent". He didn't want anyone to be able to make an accusation against them. He didn't want the world to be able to point to them and make an accusation against them. We represent Christ; we are children of God. He reminds them of that. But he wants them to be children of God who are, as he says, "above reproach", people whose conduct matches their confession.

How many people have used the charge of Christian hypocrisy as a pretext for rejecting the Gospel? They reject the Gospel because they're in rebellion against God

but they can grab that as an excuse. They can use that as a reason for not believing' 'Well, Christians are hypocrites.'

And there's been plenty of that, plenty of hypocrisy among Christians. And what Paul is saying is that he's recognizing that to be a fact and saying, 'Don't let that happen. Don't let that be true. Don't give them that kind of an excuse. Be above reproach.' We live in an evil world, what Paul describes here as, "a crooked and perverse generation." (vs15b). It's always watching and will seize every opportunity to discredit us and our message.

Remember, that's what the men of Daniel's generation did. It's not that long ago that we studied the Book of Daniel and you'll remember that the Persian officials hated having a Jew and a man of God over them. And so they tried to find some inconsistency that they could use against Daniel.

But we read in Daniel chapter 6, in verse 4 that, "They could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption" in him. His life was consistent. There was consistency between his confession and his conduct. And so they knew the only way they could trap him was in his integrity. So they made it illegal to pray, knowing that in that time in which prayer was forbidden, he would not obey that, he would not stop praying. He didn't. So they seized him and they threw him to the lions. But, as you know, God delivered him and blessed his testimony.

Now that's the kind of people we are to be—and it's the kind of people we can be because that's the kind of God we serve. That is the God we serve: The God of Daniel is the God of Paul. He's our God. He's sovereign and He's in control. And so we can rest in Him, we can trust Him, we can obey Him. And it's urgent that we do that because we, too, live in a crooked and perverse generation. Every generation is that, from the time of Adam's fall to the present, it's a crooked world.

It's an interesting description, that word "crooked". *Skolios* is the Greek word. We get the word *scoliosis*, 'scoliosis of the spine' from that, ('crooked spine'). It's used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, of Leviathan, the dragon, "that crooked serpent", in Isaiah 27:1. (KJV). That is this generation. It's like a twisted snake.

It's crafty and deadly. It's not straight, it's not right. It's not honest and true. It's subtle and false. It is darkness.

And God in His wisdom and providence has put us in it to be different, to be straight, to be true. We are "lights in the world". (vs15c). And so we are to shine in the darkness. We're to be luminaries. We are to know the truth, know the Gospel, and speak it to others.

There's no greater gift in the world than the Gospel. When the crowds began to leave Jesus, (you know this from your reading of the Scripture. And you studied it recently in the adult Sunday School class in your studies in John.) They began to leave the Lord when His ministry shrunk, in chapter 6 of that Gospel, from thousands upon thousands, to just a few men, just a handful.—Well the 12 disciples; and one of them, Jesus said, "was a devil." So there were 11 faithful men there; and Jesus asked them, "You do not want to go away, do you?" (Jn 6:67). 'Are you going to leave as well?' Then Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life." (Jn 6:68).

"Words of eternal life." And He's given those to us. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you have words of eternal life. We are the only people in the world, in the entire world, that have those words of life. All others sit in darkness, ignorance, and foolishness.

The world is a hopeless place. It is in darkness—but we have words of hope, we have words of forgiveness, we have words of life—life everlasting. We reveal a better way. What a gift to possess!

But we have more than just the Gospel, *narrowly* defined as, 'Faith alone in Christ alone by the grace of God alone.' We have the whole counsel of God. That's really the Gospel defined *broadly*. The Gospel, really the Good News, is the whole Word of God; and we have that and we are to know the whole counsel of God and be skilled enough in Scripture to help people reason through the problems of life: To help one

another with those problems; to be good counselors to one another; to be good friends in that way to people, certainly to believers but to others as well.

And our lives should be a model to others. Light, (to go back to our earlier statements in this study), light reveals beauty; and our lives ought to be beautiful to observe. When I say beauty, I mean in terms of lives that have harmony and consistency; lives that show peace in the storm; lives that exhibit care and concern for others. We should be joyful people; we should be happy people, not trivial people—serious people but not somber people.

Jesus wasn't that. Jesus was joyful; and Jesus was serious—but He wasn't austere and grave. He could stand up to the most powerful men of His day and back them down with His very presence and His words. But at the same time, children were drawn to Him. That says a great deal about the kind of man He was, the kind of character that He had. Children were drawn to Him.

He was kind, He was caring, He truly had a concern for people. And when they were in a trial, He felt for them from His soul. He felt “moved to compassion”, that's how He's described. (Mar 6:34). He had sympathy and He showed kindness. Now that's beauty that even the world has to acknowledge. And it should be what we are, “as lights in the world.” That's, as I say, a beautiful metaphor, beautiful description of God's people.

But principally in all of this, while all of that's true, *light* has to do with truth. It has to do with confession—and confession more than conduct, really. We are *light* because we possess the Gospel; we possess the message of salvation. People are attracted to the truth through our conduct—or distracted from it by our conduct. Conduct, again, is important, but it is the truth about Christ, what we speak, that people must believe in order to be saved.

There's no fault in an honest life; a caring, compassionate life. But Satan can imitate that; and his ministers imitate that. Paul talks about that in 2 Corinthians 11:15. They disguise themselves as ‘angels of light’. Charles Hodge, the Princeton theologian

said it well. He said, "Satan doesn't come to us as Satan, but in the guise of virtue. So do his teachers. So do his ministers."

That's the nature of this crooked, perverse generation in which we live. It's dangerous out there. It's deceiving out there in the world. There's never a moment when we can relax and let our guard down.

But the fact is, we're not in this world defenseless. First of all, God is at work within us, 'both to will and to do according to His good pleasure.' He's constantly working in us, empowering us—but He's also given us His Word, given us His revelation.

And really, the best defense against error is truth: Knowing the truth, being thoroughly grounded in Scripture. It's not a bad thing to know error, to learn about error. But, if you really want to be able to detect error, know the truth, know the real thing. The Word of God is our standard for right and wrong; and when we know it, we see what falls short of it.

So Paul writes in verse 16, that they, (and we too), were to be "holding fast the word of life", the Gospel; the Gospel, narrowly defined; and the Gospel widely defined as the Bible, the Word of God. It gives life. It is "the words of eternal life"—and we must hold it firmly. We need to know the truth. We need to understand the Bible. The more we do, the more we understand God's Word, the more genuinely enthusiastic we will be.

Truth affects our condition. It affects our affection, the things that we love. It transforms us. It changes our taste in what is good and what we desire. It will do that if we really understand it; if we're truly reading it and reflecting deeply upon it. And when we do that we grow in knowledge and we're able to understand more knowledge—and we increasingly love the Lord. And then, when we love the Lord more, we love His people more and we are united to Him. That unity becomes natural because when we love we sacrifice.

Paul was an example of that. He loved the Philippians and sacrificed for them. He ran and labored for them. He used up his time and his energy and his effort for them.

And he wanted to see his effort be successful. He says that in verse 16. He didn't want to have "run in vain" or to have labored, or "toiled in vain." He wanted his ministry to be a success in them. He wanted to see Christ formed in them. He wanted to see them holding on to the truth, loving the saints, and being united together. He wanted to see them loving one another as he loved them.

He loved the Philippians. He labored for them, and was willing to do far more than that: He would gladly lay down his life for them. Verse 17, "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all."

Pagans and Jews alike would pour a libation on the altar where they made their sacrifices. The Philippians had made a sacrifice of their own possessions. They had made an offering of their gifts to Paul to help sustain him in Rome. That's one of the reasons he wrote this letter, was to thank them for the gift that Epaphroditus had brought to him, that sustained him there in Rome. That was an offering they had given. And Paul was saying that in addition to what they had given him for help in the Gospel, he might have to lay down his life for the Gospel, for the faith—literally pour out his blood in service. And that would be like pouring a libation, an offering of wine, on their offering of help to him.

But he wasn't sad about that. He wasn't sad about the fact that he may give up his life in the service of Christ. He rejoiced in it, and he wanted them to rejoice in it. He tells them in verse 18, 'You too, rejoice with me.' Rejoicing in death; how different from the world is that? How different from the world in which we are to shine? It's very different.

How different from Nicholas Rubashov, the old Bolshevik in the novel *Darkness at Noon*, a story about the purges in Russia under Stalin and of a man who was crushed by the very party that he had helped build. Rubashov had a long, ruthless career, but then he became a victim of the very system that he'd supported. He was arrested, he was

interrogated, he was forced to confess to some charges made against him, and then he was sentenced to death.

It's a novel, but it's a story about things that really did happen under Stalin. And at the end of the novel, this character experienced what, no doubt, many men did experience. When he was taken from his cell he was made to walk down a long, dark corridor. And as he walked down this corridor, (at the end of the novel), he's wondering about his life, his service to the party, about the purpose of it all.

He doesn't say this but the question, in light of what Paul says, 'Had he toiled in vain, had he run in vain?' Yes, he had run in vain. His life was in vain. It's a hopeless story. And at the end of the corridor there is a gunshot—and eternity. That's how the book ends. That's the last word in the story, '*eternity*', which in the novel meant nothingness. Darkness forever.

Eternity is not nothingness. But I can imagine there are people who have devoted their lives to something—and we all devote our lives to something. Everyone's devoted to something, is living his or her life out for some purpose—something. It may be politics, it may be money, it may be pleasure, whatever. But I can imagine how many people come to the end of it all, and they wonder, "What was the point? I've run in vain."

That's not how Paul's story ended. He went to his death 'poured out as an offering'. He served the Lord to the end and met his death with confidence and joy. Who can face death like that? Who can face death rejoicing? You can, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ. And realistically, only you can, because only you and every believer in Jesus Christ have hope beyond this life.

Don't you know those tough, hard Praetorian Guards were impressed with Paul, with his outlook and his attitude? He was chained to them. He was prisoner in jail and yet he was unshakable by the circumstances: he was facing death and facing it not with grim resolve, but with joy. They might be able to understand some stoic facing it with a stiff upper lip, but he rejoiced. He was ready.

Now that's an example of shining in the darkness. I've seen it. I've seen it in men and women who in grave illness have approached death with joy, real joy, knowing where they were going—and ready to go. And that, I can promise you, is a great encouragement to me as I witnessed it in them.

But, if you're here without Christ, you don't have that. If you've not believed in Him, you don't have that hope—but you can, very easily, by believing in Jesus Christ, trusting in Him as your God and Savior. He died for sinners. He humbled Himself. He became a man in order to sacrifice Himself for all who believe. And all who believe have forgiveness and eternal life at the moment of faith. So if you're here without Christ, look to Him, believe in Him, trust in Him. May God help you to do that. Let's pray.

Father, we give You thanks that as believers in Your Son, we stand in the power of Christ. And no power in this world or the universe can pluck us from Him, from His hand, from Your hand. Thank You for the grace that put us there, the grace that saved us, continues to save us, and will save us for all eternity. Thank You for Him, and it's in His name we pray. Amen.

(End of Audio)