
UNBROKEN JOY
TALK LESS TALK LIFE
Philippians 2:14-16

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

The Apostle Paul has a strong word to say about his generation, about those living in Philippi. He said that the Philippians lived in a crooked and twisted generation. That is a strong description. We look at our own society and we might say that we live in a crooked and twisted generation. This week there was an all too familiar account of a reporter being shot and a cameraman being shot while broadcasting live with the shooter wearing a camera filming the incident. Then we are just overwhelmed with these images in the media and social media of this tragic event, trying to figure it out. How much of it can be traced to some form of mental illness or unsoundness? How would we describe our generation? How would Paul describe our generation?

If you just look at some categories: money, sex, power and look at issues of morality, greed, relationship, violence, would Paul have a similar assessment for modern western culture? I don't intend this morning to drag us through a catalog of all the things that are depressing about our contemporary culture. I just want to suggest that I think scripture describes for us many things that we find present in everyday life and we would have to say we live in a dark world.

So what are we to do? What are we to do when we find ourselves living in the midst of darkness? Do we retreat? Find shelter? Do we declare war on the darkness? Do we preach against the darkness? Maybe there is some application of these things, but Paul gives us some very clear instruction. He tells us that we are to shine as lights. Paul's challenge for us as Christians in the middle of darkness is to shine the light of God. He writes, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world..."

Paul instructs his readers here how to live as Christians and in these verses we return in some ways to a theme that he has been developing. He started at the end of Chapter one, verse 27: We are to

live lives worthy of the message, worthy of the good news, worthy of the gospel -- the message that Jesus Christ has come and brought us life. Our lives are to match that message because we have been transformed by that message. It's important, he has told us, to live as Christians, loving one another, living in humility, serving one another, living to glorify God. He has called us to shine as lights, and in these verses he gives us some instruction on how to do that. He takes us deeper into this discovery of how to live as Christians and in particular, how to shine, because he has warned us against the dangers of division and arguing and disunity. He said to us this is not appropriate. This dishonors God and it hurts the church.

But he gives us now this motivation that if we don't live as we should live as Christians, it hurts our witness. It prevents us from shining as light in a dark world. Now he takes us into a motivation of, "Let's live right and do right so that others can see and live." Specifically, he tells us to do two things. I summarize them in this way: Talk Less and Talk Life. That's our title for this morning's message. There is a certain kind of talk that cannot be heard from us as Christians, specifically: grumbling, complaining and arguing. Then there is a certain kind of talk that must be heard. Paul calls on us to hold out the word of life. He tells us that we are to speak forth who Christ is. So there is a negative and a positive.

Let's begin with the negative -- Talk Less, verses 14 and 15: "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish..." Now, what's interesting in verses 14 and 15 is that there is only one command. That command is the first phrase: "Do all things without grumbling or disputing..." The verse does not read: "Do not grumble. Be blameless. Be innocent. Be children of God. Be without blemish. Shine as lights." If it did read that way, if all of those were commands, well it would be in one sense biblically true. You could say that in some ways all of that is inferred, but there is a different perspective when you see it according to how Paul wrote it and how the spirit of God inspired it. The one command is: Do everything without grumbling or complaining, for the purpose of, in order that you would be blameless, children of God, innocent, without blemish, shining as lights. What does that do? That takes all of that and it loads it up on this one thing that we are to do. It tells you that your words matter and that they are very important. Don't grumble, don't argue, so that these other things may be true.

There are various translations for these first two words. The ESV that I read from tells us that we are to do all things without grumbling or disputing. Other translations include complaining, murmuring, questioning, bickering, second guessing, or grumbling and disputing. We have here a description of all forms of contentious speech, difficult words, and disagreeable comments; in a sense, negative speech in all its forms that brings division. I am unhappy. I'm disappointed. Why

do we have to do it that way? Why can't we do it this way? The questioning, the undermining, the glass is not just half empty, but the glass is dirty and I don't like the way you're holding it, It's a negative, complaining attitude. Paul says to do everything without grumbling, arguing. Your words matter. Your words matter and your attitude matters.

This first phrase is: "Do all things." We really want to take note when the scripture gives us these kinds of comprehensive instructions. It tells us that all of our speech is to be characterized by an absence of this negative speech. In order to do that, we have to look deeper. We have to look at our hearts. We have to look at our attitudes, because our words reveal our attitudes and eventually what's in our heart will come out. So Paul says do all things. He is after here a heart attitude, as our words express what's in our hearts.

We ask ourselves, "Am I disappointed? Am I without faith and without hope? Am I negative? Would others describe me as a negative person? Am I divisive?" Or, "Am I truly humbly serving others and living to the glory of God? Am I full of gratitude for who God is and what he has done in my life, and my eternity, which is secure in him? Am I living for self and to exalt self, or am I living for the glory of God?" In many ways, Paul was simply following up on what he has already said. In the previous two verses he talked about obedience and working out your salvation in fear and trembling. He is saying, "I want you, as you have always obeyed, as you have always done that in my presence, now in my absence keep obeying. Work out your salvation." In some ways he is coming and saying, "Now, here is how you do that. Here is how you work out your salvation. Here is how you obey: Don't grumble. Don't complain."

What do my words reveal about what's in my heart about my attitude? In many ways, it would help us to just take this first point very literally -- to talk less. If I just talk less, would I exalt myself less? Would I bring less division? Would I be less complaining? Less negative? Help me, Lord, to look at my heart, because my attitude matters.

My words matter, my attitude matters, but Paul goes deeper. He challenges them on the basis of their identity. He tells them, "Your identity matters." Do you notice that he addresses them in these verses as children of God? He wants them to avoid this negative speech, that they might be blameless and innocent children of God. He highlights who they are at the point of their identity. Martin Lloyd-Jones writes these words:

The Apostle Paul seems to be quite incapable of merely making an exhortation as such. He never just gives people a number of rules and regulations: Do this, don't do that. He always puts his warning in terms of the whole. Paul's immediate purpose here is to exhort them to do all things, to work out their salvation without murmurings and disputings, but he puts it

all in terms of their status and position as children of God. That's the central thing in this exhortation. The appeal is couched in that manner because they are children of God, and it is addressed to them as such. The implication is this: Because you were that, these are the things you must now remember and put into practice.

We are children of God. If we live life murmuring, this low grade discontentment always being expressed, it's contrary to who we are. We cannot help but be conflicted as we progress, because we are living in a way that contradicts who we are as the children of God. We are to give thanks. We are to give thanks in all circumstances, according to 1 Thessalonians 5. We are children of God. Our identity is secure in Jesus Christ.

It's interesting here, because Paul is quoting directly an Old Testament passage -- Deuteronomy, Chapter 32, verse 5. Listen to these words, where the Lord pronounces a judgment on the children of Israel because they grumbled and murmured against the Lord: "They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation." Paul is almost directly taking those key words: twisted, crooked generation, they are blemished; they are no longer children of God. He is using that to draw a contrast for how he wants the Philippians to now live out their identity as children of God.

In Chapter 3, we are going to discover that the Philippians are facing a temptation to relate to God based on legalism, to require circumcision, to require facets of the Old Testament ceremonial law to be given. There is a temptation to live an Old Testament life rather than a New Covenant life. So Paul, as a master teacher, takes that language, language that they would be very familiar with, and he directly applies it to their situation. But he says, "Listen, the only way to know God is to be in Christ. The only way to know him is grace, to be forgiven because of what Christ has done in your place. When you in faith trust him, you take on a new identity as a child of God. That's a gift! You receive it by faith. Now, live true to who you are, with a secure eternity."

The Christian is not to be characterized by complaining, because all grumbling ultimately is directed toward God. If we believe that God has created us, has redeemed us, is sovereign over all and is directing our lives and directing this universe, then our complaints are ultimately complaints against him. What we are saying without articulating it is, "God, if I were God, I would do things differently than you do them." So a strong caution is given here.

Just consider this first point a little further before we move on. Our words matter, our attitude matters, our identity matters – words connect deeply to all of these things. There is one more aspect here where he talks about their reputation. Do everything without grumbling or complaining so that you will be without blemish. You will be innocent, without experience in sin,

that you will be without blemish, without tarnish. What is he saying to us: “without blame?” He is saying to us that complaining brings a stain. A negative pattern of speech brings a stain on your reputation and who you are representing. Paul calls us to be children of God, without blame, innocent, without blemish.

When God moves, he desires for us to meet it with faith, to express thanksgiving, to talk about how God is moving and redeeming and working. I recently found myself really convicted in this area. Many of you know that a week and a half ago I went to a church in our area where the pastor and his wife had both had a moral failure, and it had been publicly announced in the newspapers nationwide, because of the prominence of this man’s ministry. When I went there, there were about 150 people at the prayer meeting. As we were praying, I was deeply moved by the humility of the people and the sense of relief that they felt in the Lord as they were just trusting God in this difficult season. I remembered that there had been times where prior to all of this, I just had a negative attitude. I didn’t come out and speak directly against it, but as everything unfolded I don’t think I spoke in faith for what God was going to do in that situation. I don’t think that I prayed as much as I just described the unpleasant circumstances.

My point is that even in the midst of darkness, we have an opportunity to shine as lights by speaking forth gratitude and faith in what God has done and in what God will do. It’s an important lesson for us. Our words matter. Talk less. For some of us, that’s the simple application of “Do everything without grumbling or complaining.” We just back off and we make room for God to adjust our hearts. One verse and then we will go to the second point. James 1:19: “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger...” Oh I wish I had learned this truth when I was 10 years old, and lived my whole life practicing it. Talk Less.

#2—Talk Life. Verse 16: “Holding fast to the word of life.” There’s some debate over how to translate this first part of verse 16. The ESV translates it “hold fast.” Other translations translate it “hold out.” “Hold out the word of life.” I prefer this second translation. I believe that’s what the context demands, but there are a number of modern translations and old translations that hold to it, and a number of commentators and bible teachers. Both are biblically true. We are to hold firm to God’s word and we are to hold God’s word out. As I said, I believe that the context leans toward the latter, but we need to do both.

The point here for us, in speaking life, talking less, talking life, is that there is a kind of speech that should not be ours, but then there are words that we need to speak. And we shine as lights in two different ways. Think about this for a minute. If you look at the stars in the heavens, the stars shine

in contrast to the darkness, and that's part of Paul's point. You are to live a different life so that your life as a Christian is a contrast to those who are not Christians. And there is way that that's the way the light works.

But, contrast is not the only way that light works. It's also an influence. It shines out. It illumines, so that when we talk about being enlightened, we are saying that the enlightened person has received light or understanding that they didn't previously have. Paul, I believe, is emphasizing both, that we shine as lights by living a holy life. Specifically in this case, that will be reflected in our words, what we don't say, that we are to live without blemish, without blame, innocent, not partaking of sin, and that will be reflected in our speech. But we are also to influence. We are to shine. There are words that we speak that give life to people.

You may be here and the first point may have been especially applicable to you. Or you may be here and you say, "You know what? There are times when I'm silent, when I need to speak up and I need to say, 'There's hope in Jesus Christ,' and all too often I am silent when I need to talk."

So, we give light. We illumine. We influence. Why? Is it because we have it all together? Are we better people? No. No, obviously not. We have received grace. We have received God's mercy, God's gift. God has showered his love upon us. He has opened our eyes. He has raised us from death and given us spiritual life. It's not that we have it all together. When we speak life, it's not, "Hey, look at me – I'm perfect." It's, "No – if you see anything about me that's good and right, it's God's mercy. It's God's grace."

The word of life is the good news. The word of life is the gospel. If we don't speak it then our attempts to live holy lives will be completely misunderstood. If we don't tell people that Jesus has given us new life, that he is transforming us, then our attempts to live differently will just be construed as self-righteous and judgmental.

Again quoting Martin Lloyd-Jones, he writes, "Our morality and ethics are but an introduction to our gospel. In other words, all that I am as a Christian, all that I do and say and all that I refrain from doing is nothing but a kind of introduction to my soul." Do you hear him? My lifestyle is an introduction. It's making a way for you to see what my soul is really about, for me to tell you a message about Jesus Christ. He continues, "The second thing, therefore, that his exhortation tells us about ourselves is that it must always be perfectly clear to the world that you and I as Christians

are what we are because of the gospel.” It must always be clear that you and I are what we are because of the gospel, because of Jesus Christ.

We have been given words of life. The Christian has been born of the spirit of God. He is new and alive because of this word. This is glorious. Think about this for just a minute. I don’t know if as I was making the first point about not complaining, not arguing, not being divisive, just not being negative, if you felt a little bit of conviction or even condemnation. I would ask for a show of hands, but I’m afraid of what I might see. If you look at your own speech and say, “Wow, I wish I could take these words back,” think about the second point for a minute. The word of life of Christ is: Confess your sin and he will forgive you and he will cleanse you of all unrighteousness. It’s not up to us to reform ourselves and to earn our place with God. We receive it as a gift.

When I think all of the words that I’ve spoken in 54 years that I wish I hadn’t spoken, and all of the words that I wish I could take back, and all the times I’ve hurt people that I love, and have feared that those words would be so destructive, to be able to come and say, “Lord, I’m forgiven in you and you’ve given me life and your grace is greater than my sin” -- that is powerful! It’s time for me to speak up! It’s time for you to speak life, to make it clear that there is life in Jesus Christ.

Now, I’m giving you one more thing to do, right? You’re busy. You are a busy person, and I am telling you that God wants you to make it a priority to speak about him, to basically disciple other people, to share Jesus Christ with other people and to help people grow. We have been given a commission: Go and make disciples. Matthew 28:18:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

I am to be a disciple-maker. You are to be a disciple-maker. We are to go, to baptize, to teach everything that the Lord has taught, so that we give ourselves to following Christ, knowing him, knowing his truth, and teaching other people who he is and what he has done and that truth. That’s our call as Christians – to go and make disciples.

Now, you are thinking, “I don’t know that I have time for that. That’s a lot! And people are busy, and will people have time?” Here’s what I’ve found: that people always have time for two things.

They always have time for life, and death. They always make time for those two things. When someone dies, we stop. Everything stops. When we die, everything stops. But the same is true for life. When there is contagious energy, excitement, people can be so busy, but they come to life because they are tired of death. They are tired of the mundane. They are tired of the busy. They are searching for life. You and I as Christians are not salespeople. We don't have a pitch to make. We have a stick of dynamite! It's explosive! It's powerful! It will blow you up! It's the word of life. It transforms. It makes new.

We are doing a discipleship course on praying and reading the bible. In one sense it's a program, but let's just be clear -- in God's economy, you are God's program. We are seeking to equip you to pray, to equip one another to pray and read the bible, and then to take that and be able to transfer it to others, to teach others to pray and read the bible. Why? Because you are God's program. That's what God did. Jesus came in the flesh. He spoke to thousands. He fed thousands, but his program was 12 people, really 11, and he disciplined them. It's a whole different perspective when you say to God, "One life matters." I have an opportunity to speak words of life to one person at a time. I'm busy. I know. We're busy. But this is God's program and people will come to life. God's word is life-giving. His word brings me into relationship with him as I respond in faith. God's word, the word of life, allows me to walk with him and to walk along with others as I invite others to walk with him.

David Platt in his book *Radical* tells us about a man named Bullen who lived in the Sudan, and David Platt met him there. Bullen was a Christian, but he had watched literally thousands of people die; thousands of Christian brothers and sisters die at the hands of persecutors. As he writes, David Platt tells us that he sat amidst all of the ruins of 20 years of civil war there in the Sudan, visiting with this man, drinking tea. And Bullen said to David Platt -- David Platt, Ph.D. from seminary, pastored a large church at the time here in the States -- here is this man in the Sudan, never traveled far from his own village and he said, "I am going to impact the world." "I am going to impact the world." So David Platt asked him how. He said, "Well, I'm going to make disciples of all nations." That's God's plan, isn't it? Just imagine this for a moment: a man who lost his parents in childhood and raised himself in the middle of civil war with limited resources, saying to David Platt, "I'm going to impact the world." When Platt questioned him further, he said, "Now, how are you going to do this?" He said, "I'm going to make disciples of all nations." So Platt said, "You are

going to impact the world and make disciples of all nations?” He said at that moment, Bullen looked at him, raised his cup of tea, smiled from ear to ear, and said, “Why not?”

So what are we going to do in the midst of darkness? We are going to shine as lights. We are going to impact the world. We are going to make disciples. Very practical instruction is given to us - less of a certain kind of speech that we learn to eliminate from our vocabulary, and more of a different kind. Talk Less, Talk Life, and let's change the world. Why not? It's God's program.