

MODELING CHRIST IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE

Philippians 2:14-15; 4:4-14

Well this morning I want us to be thinking along the lines of, “*What is the legacy I am passing on to my loved ones?* Or “*What is the best inheritance and/or heritage I could leave behind?*” Is it a fat bank account? Is it possessions? Like land or valuable items? A trade or skill? I would suggest that it’s none of those things. I would suggest that it’s something more spiritual in nature: it’s a godly, spiritual legacy. Proverbs says a good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children, and that’s true. A man should work hard and think about how he can provide for his family. However, a Christlike legacy will leave them eternally rich. It’s something left not in their hands, but in their hearts and etched in their minds through the way you lived your life for Christ, seeking to pass on the wisdom of Christ. Wisdom meaning, ‘skilled at living.’



The psalmist David said, “*The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup. You support my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me.*” You know he’s not talking about the boundary lines of his property, right? He’s talking about the spiritual inheritance – a divine allotment more concerned about spiritual life – truth, hope, joy, peace, character, wisdom, etc.

That’s what we’re talking about in this short series called ***Modeling Christ – imitating Christ and being an example, or model to others*** (1 Thess. 1:6-7). Last week I introduced it as a concept and we saw that it was important because consciously or unconsciously, we tend to imitate people around us. It’s like osmosis or radiation or something. We can’t help but imitate other people. Even if we don’t want to, we will start to pick up on their habits and actions of those whom we spend the most time around and need to note that by the way we live, we are passing on a legacy – good or bad.

If this is true – and it is – we should think about what it means to be a role model Christian and even collectively, a role model church. It’s critical to legacies and to being an effective, winsome believer. It’s like atheist Fredrich Nietzsche said, “*Show me that you are redeemed and I’ll listen to you talk about your Redeemer.*”ⁱ A Christlike life is probably not enough to lead someone to Christ – you have to actually share Christ with them – but no one would deny a lifestyle that back up the message, making it more attractive.

I think **contagious** is a key word for this study. A Christlike lifestyle is contagious. Like a match that lights other matches. Consider Philippians 2:14-15 before we even get to our main text, “*Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so 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.” We are to be these lights of peace and joy and gentleness in grumbling, disputing world.

By the way, I asked my wife the other night what the opposite of contagious is and she said, “repulsive.” Then I started looking up some synonyms for repulsive just to see if I could find something more memorable like *contagious* or *contemptible*. That was a good contrast word too. But you know what I found? *Unchristian*. Unchristian was in the list of synonyms for repulsive! Are we contagious or unchristian?

As we come to the letter from Paul to the Philippians today, this is what Paul is all about – Christians standing out by their otherness – especially their ability to have *joy and peace despite the circumstances*. Actually, according to this letter, I could argue that joy and peace are what our “light” consists of.

 **Our “light” consists of our joy and peace in Christ – outwardly evidenced by gentleness.**

And like the Philippians suffering at the hands of the perverse world, we’re all going to experience different *circumstances that want to try and blow out our “light”*. If you think of it like a candle’s flame, it’s pretty easy to blow out, isn’t it? Well, today I want to look at some different instructions from Philippians 4:4-14 that Paul says we should practice to guard our lights and to keep them from being blown out.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is a good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things which you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can all things through Him who strengthens me. Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in affliction.”

Alright, so again, this is the apostle Paul writing to the church in Philippi. It was a church planted by God through the grace given to Paul on his 2nd missionary journey. It was the first church planted in Europe, west of the Aegean Sea. In 42 BC Philippi came under Roman control and Octavian honored Philippi as a Roman colony and military outpost, thus endowing the Philippians with Roman citizenship.ⁱⁱ And that’s important because throughout the letter you have this Roman-colony language. For example, when Paul tells them they are *citizens of heaven* in 3:20, they get that. They have an even better citizenship they’ve been given and that they represent. They are a “colony” of heaven, living the light of heaven in Philippi. Isn’t that great?

 **We are citizens of heaven, living the light of heaven, in the world.**

But you can read about this **church plant** in Acts 16, which was approximately **49 AD**. You might recall the Philippian jailer who asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe

in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” Maybe someone here need to hear that this morning. Believe (trust) in Jesus as your Savior and you’ll be saved. It’s that simple. Philippi is also the place where the Lord opened the heart of a woman named Lydia to believe. Paul made more than one trip here to visit them again.

However, by the time Paul is writing this, about **12 years** has passed and it is a very personal, friendly, thank-you letter to this church for their financial gift of support to Paul (4:10-20) – who was **content** either way; with or without their gift – even though he is **writing this from a Roman prison**. In 1:13 he mentions the **praetorian guard**, a Navy Seals-like unit of the Roman military. They were probably chained to him as he awaited trial before Caesar where he could lose his life (1:20). And so that’s the context that this text is in that just sharpens the application of this passage to a degree that is almost strange to us. He’s talking about having joy and peace in a prison cell, waiting possible execution. Naturally, I could think of someone talking about joy and peace as they live the American dream and go on vacation, but prison? Persecution? That’ll make your ears perk up to listen to this man’s advice.

 **Interpretation Principle: Keep the text in the context for the greatest impact.**

He is teaching on joy and peace in the middle of some of the bleakest of circumstances – telling us to do the same. *“The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.”* His counsel is so strange that we might think it is cold or insensitive, but here’s the thing: If our joy is based on our circumstances, the reality is we’re in for a pretty hard life – a miserable life. I shared that with someone this week and they said, “That’s a truth bomb!” And it is.

 **Truth Bomb: If your joy is based on your circumstances, you are in for a miserable life.**

One of the things we’ve learned over that past year or so is that you can’t always control the circumstances. And **uncontrolled circumstances lead to blocked goals, which leads us to a host of negative emotions like worry, anger, fear, frustration, annoyance.**

But here’s **your challenge to modeling Christ: To display the peace and joy of Christ in any and every circumstance.** That is one of the most helpful things we can do at times to advance of the gospel. I have to share what Gordon Fee said about this: *“Here is God’s ultimate gift to those who trust in Christ, shalom [peace] and joy. In a post-Christian, post-modern world, which has generally lost its bearings because it has generally abandoned its God, such spirituality is very often the key to effective evangelism. In a world where fear is a much greater reality than joy, our privilege is to live out the gospel of true shalom, wholeness in every sense of that word, and to point others to its source.”* If we want to be a light of shalom and joy in the world pointing people to the Source of your light, Paul gives us instructions to guard that light.

1st LIGHT GUARD: GUARD YOUR JOY IN THE LORD. (V. 4)

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice!” Notice how commanding Paul is. He states it twice in the imperative tense. He is saying *“Take action! Intentionally rejoice!”* Rejoice in Christ who has saved you and keeps you and gives you life and gives you a glorious future. You have every reason to rejoice. In a world with so many negatives, you just have to guard your joy!

And maybe one of the most helpful things you can do, as Paul did, is to make sure that you don’t have a *misplaced basis for joy*. We can mis-conceptualize the Christian life in our minds and I’ll illustrate that: Imagine you’re at this harbor and in the harbor there’s two very different types of ships: a cruise ship and a battleship. When you board a cruise ship, you’re thinking vacation, buffets, hot tubs, entertainment, etc. But when you board a battleship, you board that ship with an entirely different mindset. Your mind is on mission, on assignment, on facing possible danger in battle. But *imagine boarding the battleship when you*

think you've boarded the cruise ship. You're going to be really confused. Disillusioned. Where's the all-you-can-eat buffet? The hot tubs? The delicacies? The pool? It isn't what you thought it was and so you'll want to jump ship, especially when people start shooting at you!

Well, that's kind of like what Paul is says in this book. When you come to Christ, you aren't boarding a cruise ship. You're boarding a battleship. And if you think the goal is to spend the rest of your life on a cruise ship, you're going to be angry and confused when people start shooting at you as a Christian (through criticism/persecution). The mission is not my comfort, but Christlikeness. If they persecuted Christ, then they'll persecute you and if they do, well then, you're becoming more like Christ is all! And if you that cruciform idea, then you're on the track to joy and peace in it and being a light in the world. Does that make sense? You'll advance the gospel through it just like him! That's the Christlike legacy he wants to pass on.

One of the reasons that Paul is rejoicing is because God has used his circumstances to advance the gospel. Actually, gospel appears more in this letter than any other letter of his – even Romans!

 **God can use all of our circumstances to advance the gospel. (1:12-14)**

Remember, he's chained to these guards and their hearing the gospel and lives are still being transformed. Chapter 1:12, he says, *“Now I want you to know, brethren, that **my circumstances have turned out for the greater good of the gospel**, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have for more courage to speak the word of God without fear.”* Isn't that great?! The gospel is not bound. God was using it to reach even Caesar's household according to 4:22.

2nd LIGHT GUARD: GUARD YOUR HEART AND MIND. (VV. 4, 6-7)

Look at verse 6: *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”* That's pretty simple, yes? Guard your heart & mind through prayer.

 **The peace of God comes through prayer to God.**

You've got to pray! No prayer, no peace. Undesirable circumstances cause all sorts of feelings like fear, anxiety, worry, anger which are caused by the mental preoccupations of *“what if's”*. Paul says be preoccupied with prayer whenever the *“what if's”* come. Take the circumstances to God and He'll give you a **supernatural peace** – more than just some psychological peace.

We know fear and worry won't change anything. And like Larry Moyer says in his devo, “If God wanted me to carry a load of anxiety, he would have given me broader shoulders.” Get on your knees and deal with whatever's weighing you down. Take it to the Lord. *“Cast all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you”* (1 Pet. 5:7). He wants us to be anxiety free, living in peace. The word peace is *eirene*, the OT equivalent of *shalom* – which carries the thought of a total well-being, flourishing inside & out.

Inward joy and peace are 2 distinctive marks of believers and it's evidenced outwardly by gentleness.

Inward Joy is commanded  **Evidenced outwardly by Gentleness.**
Inward Peace is promised

“Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near,” (v. 5). What does he mean by the Lord is near? It's kind of like he just throws it in there as if Psalm 34 or 145:18 was his devotional that morning, *“the Lord is near to the broken hearted”* or *“the Lord is near to all who call on Him”* He using something called *intertextuality* to speak this psalm in a new way.ⁱⁱⁱ But also, Paul had his focus on the Lord's return

throughout this book so it could be apocalyptic language – the coming of the Lord is near too (Zeph. 1:7; Rom. 13:12; Jas. 5:8). It may have a double meaning that Paul is known for.

3rd LIGHT GUARD: GUARD YOUR THOUGHT LIFE. (VV. 8-9)

This comes from his exhortation to dwell on what is true, honorable, right, lovely, of good repute, what is excellent, what is praiseworthy – Dwell is a present tense imperative plural verb. It's like saying, "*I command you all to constantly be dwelling on these things.*"

The word has the idea of precise calculation and selections in your head. Guarding your mind requires doing math in your head. Subtract (-) the worry, add (+) the trust. Divide (÷) and conquer the fear, multiply (x) the faith.

Do the spiritual math in your head.

There's a lot of junk to dwell on in this world and you have to pick it apart selectively. To embrace what is good in this world and culture we're living in. Have a grid to filter out the good and bad. It's a good time to be picky. Some of you are picky eaters, but we all need to be picky about what we feed your soul.

Be picky about what you feed your soul.

If we feed our mind main stream media most of the day and only 10 minutes in the Word and 5 minutes in prayer, we shouldn't be surprised when we lack joy and peace. We have to guard our minds better than that.

The thing about our thought life is that all of us are going to struggle with thoughts. Sometimes wicked thoughts just come out of nowhere – that's the flesh, the sin nature talking – but we've got to learn to take thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:15). One of my favorite sayings about this concept is, "*You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.*" And it's important to control the thoughts because private thoughts lead to public action when they aren't dealt with. Proverbs would say, "*As a man thinks within himself, so he is.*"

Most of the week I was studying Genesis 4 & 5 in preparation for our Sunday school class and it talks about Cain. Cain's worship offering was rejected while Abel's was accepted, and that made him angry. The Bible said he was "*very angry*" and "*his countenance fell.*" God graciously questioned him and encouraged him to deal with the sin knocking at his door, that was about to become his master, but he didn't. He just kept ruminating in his jealousy and envy and before you know it, he was locked in this unrepentant state of bitterness. His entire demeanor changed and like the NT says of him and of everyone who allows anger to fester, it made him a bitter person (Heb. 12:15) and Satan got a foothold in his life (Eph. 4:26-27). That's what happens when we don't uproot our anger and deal with it. 1 John 3:12 says Satan used that to bring about the first murder and Satan's first attempt to take out the godly Seed of Christ (Gen. 3:15).

Paul could of very easily let his circumstances and his critics make him angry with God and others. But he accepted it as a cruciform – a cross-way that He was learning to imitate Christ in. He let it mold him into Christlikeness, making him better, not bitter. It's might be an overused principle but:

Our circumstances can either make us bitter or better.

For those without Christ, it's understandable that people would grow harder and angrier and bitter the older they get. They don't have the supernatural power or hope that there's something glorious just around the corner. But for us in Christ? We have the spiritual power and we have the hope that the older we get, the more we are renewed on the inside, day by day – we become more joyful, more peaceable, more gentle. The older we get, the more time God has had to work in us and the closer we are to glory. Live or die, we can't lose! 1:21 says, "*to live is Christ and to die is gain.*" And that takes us to our final point:

4th LIGHT GUARD GUARD: GUARD YOUR GOALS.

Remember, Paul understood life was not about seeing who could live the longest on the cruise ship, but the battleship, being conformed to Christ and advancing the gospel. He wanted to know Christ more which meant his circumstances only allowed God more opportunity to receive glory through his weaknesses.

This is what he said in in chapter 3:7-10. The title of chapter 3 in my Bible is “The Goal of Life”, *“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of **knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.**”* And he continues on to talk about it as race. *“Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus.”*

You want to know why I love that? Because the goal is to know Christ more and more and more, even experientially – not just in knowledge. You see what many do is they gain a certain level of knowledge and plateau. They quit challenging themselves and quit learning. Paul says, *“I press on in this upward call. I keep climbing that podium where the prize is.”* I have to ask you in light of that – are you pressing on? Or have you plateaued?

And lastly, let’s look at his secret. Chapter 4:12, *“In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”* It’s kind of an interesting word Paul used there for *secret*. He’s using the language of the philosophical Stoics in the area who taught contentment through self-sufficiency. He’s playing off of that, saying...



The “secret” is not self-sufficiency, but Christ-sufficiency.

The secret for Christians is Christ – we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. Joy and peace, gentleness and contentment, are only possible through Christ. He is the Source of our light.

That’s my challenge for us as we leave here today. Keep guarding your joy, your heart, your mind, your goals. Keep growing in Christ by His grace. Keep shining. That may be the most influential thing you can do in our culture today and it will be the most important legacy you leave your loved ones. Most mothers struggle with anxiety and most father with anger – and they’re just as contagious. Take it to Christ and receive the joy and peace you need to pass on a spiritual legacy.

Recently, I heard a story about a pastor who was in a funeral procession. He was following the hearse and behind him was several cars. Well, on the way to the graveside he really had to go to the bathroom, so he decided to pull over at a rest stop. And when he came back out he noticed there was a line of cars still waiting behind his. He had forgotten people were following him. We need to remember that, like it or not, we are setting an example and leaving a legacy. The final question is, *“Is it a legacy pointing people to Christ?”*

ⁱ Larry Moyer, *31 Days to Contagious Living: A Daily Devotional on Modeling Christ to Others* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000), 8.

ⁱⁱ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995).

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.