

Shine Like Stars

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Preacher: Mike H

[0 : 00] This is a sermon from King's Church West a fridge magnet verse.

Okay, so what I mean by that, a fridge magnet verse, is the kind of verse that you often, sound like a little inspiring quotation that you might see plastered on somebody's fridge. The kind of thing that as you're reaching for your milk to pour on your cornflakes in the morning might make you feel inspired and ready to go for the day.

And that's all well and good. I've got nothing against that. If you have fridge magnet verses, keep them on your fridge. I've got no problem with that whatsoever. What I want to do today is look at one of these fridge magnet verses and I want to show you that there is more depth than just the words themselves.

I want to show you the verse that we're going to look at today where Paul encourages us and tells us that we can, that we are children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation and that we will shine like stars in the sky as we hold firmly to the word of life.

I want to show you that in those verses is a depth that if we accept God's invitation, that he will partner with us to make us people who are expanding and increasing his kingdom on this world, that we would indeed, that his light would shine through us, that we would be representatives of him in this world.

[1 : 52] So I'm going to do that. So I'm going to just read the verses and then we're going to get into it. So the verse, if you don't have a Bible, should come up on the screen there. So we're reading from chapter two, verses 12 through 18.

So, Therefore, 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.

But even if I'm 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.

[3 : 03] So, Paul encourages us here to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

But then he says something which kind of contradicts that straight away. He says, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

So hang on a second. Which is it? Is it me who works out my salvation with fear and trembling? Or is it God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose?

Which one is it? Well, it's really both. And I'm going to attempt to show you why. Back in chapter 1, if you remember, if you've got really good memory, chapter 1, verse 6, it says, I thank God for all of you for God started a good work in you which he will continue until the day of Christ Jesus.

So the work is definitely started by God and seemingly it is completed by God because he is going to continue it through to the day of Christ Jesus. But it seems even this bit in the middle, it's he works in us to will and to act.

[4 : 19] He even does that bit. And yet, it is also our responsibility to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. I wonder if an illustration might help to explain this a little bit.

I'm sure everybody here is familiar with the concept of apprenticeship. The idea is that you, that a young man or woman, it comes under the wing of an older person, an experienced, wise person, a person who knows his or her trade really well and he or she helps that person to gain from their wisdom experience so that they, in turn, might go on into the world to do the good thing which

they've taught them to do.

Now, I've worked for a number of years in the construction industry and so you can imagine that I have come across many apprentices in my time, roofers, electricians, plumbers and generally, these apprentices, from their perspective, they have a hard life.

They do have a hard life, particularly the younger ones, 16, 17-year-olds. They're getting out of their beds at hours that they didn't even know existed. They go into a building site, their hands are cracked and bleeding because they're using them in ways that they've never used them before. Their brains are fried from all the things that their tradesman is trying to teach them and tell them. They have a tough life.

[6 : 00] They are working hard. Some of them are at the end of their tether and as well as trying to learn all these new things, they're also trying to work out their banter on the building site, work out if the jokes really are on them, trying to work out if there really is such a thing as tartan paint and from their perspective, they are working hard.

Now, it has been my privilege to get to know many apprentices over the years and some of them I've seen go from boy to man and become useful traits for themselves. Some of them even have risen to become directors of a company to which they're apprenticed to.

But you might think from the apprentices' perspective, they're doing all the work here. But the truth is, and I happen to know this for a fact, that actually quite a lot of work is being done on their behalf by their employer.

Now, employers, they don't just take on these apprentices at virtually slave labour prices for their own benefit. In fact, it actually costs them quite a lot to do so. They do have to pay their wages and usually the apprentices don't really justify their own wages in terms of their output.

They have to put them through college and pay for all that sort of stuff. But the most costly thing is that they have to invest time from themselves and from their tradesmen.

[7 : 19] They could be making money for the company. They have to invest all that in the apprentices. There's a lot of work going on in the background. A friend of mine who owns one of the largest plumbing contractors in Edinburgh, he reckons that he's put dozens of apprentices through to qualification.

He reckons that for every apprentice that he's put through, it has cost him £100,000. So you can imagine if at any one time he's got 10 apprentices on the go, that's a million quid!

That's a lot of money! So you might ask yourself, well, why did they do it? Well, two reasons really. One is that actually, contrary to reputation, most business owners aren't heartless capitalists just trying to extract all the profit from their business.

But actually, they do actually care about society. They want to invest back into society. They want their trade to be well represented into the future after they've retired. That's one reason. But the other reason, and the more important reason really, is actually, they're just quite like the kid.

And they want to see him or her do well and set them on their way in the working world. When Paul encourages us to work out our salvation, he isn't encouraging us to work out if we are saved or not.

[8 : 44] That's an established fact. If you put your trust in Jesus, you are saved. You will receive the benefits of eternal life. It's more like working out what the grace, the salvation which you've walked into, what it means for your life.

Plunging the depths of the riches in Christ. And it is actually hard work. Working out your salvation, it means spending time in prayer with God.

It means actively avoiding sinful patterns of behavior, some of which you might actually quite enjoy. It means your brain being fried from trying to work out what on earth the Bible is saying on a daily basis.

It means doing works of service to other people which are of no direct benefit necessarily to you. It means coming along and being part of a church and sometimes some of the people in that church you might find really annoying.

That's what it means and that is hard work. But you know, the truth is that God is actually working hard. Just like the employer is working hard and they're part of his apprenticeship, God is working hard on our behalf.

[10 : 01] even if we set aside the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the work that he did on the cross for us, which is quite a big thing just to set aside, but nevertheless, if we do that, God is still working hard on our behalf.

Even if I just consider my own heart and my own interaction that I have with God, how often and how regularly and consistently God has been patient with me as he has helped me along in my walk of sanctification, my walk of becoming more and more like Christ, how often I have fallen away and refused God and resisted his will and yet I know how patient he is and how much he just encourages me again to walk with him.

Now God is doing that for me for sure. He's also doing it for two billion other believers across the world. Imagine holding that in your hands and as well as that, the other four or five billion people, however many it is, he's also leading those ones to salvation.

God is working hard on our behalf, is he not? You know, it says in Ephesians chapter 2, you are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he has prepared in advance for us to do.

So you can see that in a sense we are like God's apprentice. We are working hard, yes, but God is working hard on our behalf when he works in us to will and to do.

[11:41] And so, where does that lead us? Well, one of the things that lead us is in, which Paul talks about here, is to do everything without grumbling or arguing. I want us just to reflect for a second on just how materially blessed we are in this world.

Put your hand up if in the last 24 hours you have used running hot water. Just put your hand up. I'm pretty certain that will be everywhere. I'm not wanting to know who's had a shower, by the way.

I just want you to realise how amazing that is because you see, although we take it for granted that having running hot water in our houses is just a human right, it's actually far, far from it.

It is a minuscule percentage of the, if you took the entire human race throughout all of history, how many of those people do you think have running hot water? Not very many. A significantly less than 1%, I should think.

And yet, we just take it for granted. And we have many, many other material things that we just take for granted in our lives. Now, you might think this day of great material blessing we have so much, so much more than we really need if we're honest.

[12:52] That, that might make this day a day of generosity and goodwill to all men. That society might, because we have just so much, might just freely hand out things to one another without being remotely greedy or selfish in any way.

Do you think that reflects the society, Western society in which it lives, in which we live? I don't think it really does, does it? I was speaking to Alan, who's no longer sitting there, who knows where he's gone.

He was telling me that he was down in London this week, and London, he said, I said, how was it? And he said, it was chaos because the tubes, the tubes are on strike, the drivers are on strike, and there's bikes and taxis everywhere.

It looks like some of those images that you see of cities in the Far East with bikes, taxis everywhere. I think Mumbai, but without the cows. It was, it was, it was just chaos, he said.

And, yeah, because the tube, the tube drivers on strike. Also, I was, I understand that the, the junior doctors are themselves preparing to strike once again because their terms and conditions aren't quite good enough.

[14:05] Now, I don't particularly want to get into the rights and wrongs of whether these people should be, should or shouldn't be on strike, but you can understand that you don't really get to the point of downing tools and leaving your work without a good bit of grumbling and arguing.

You know, there's, there's quite a lot of grumbling and arguing that has to go through to get there. And that is the spirit of the age in which we live. There's, everybody is working for their own rights. There's a spirit of grumbling.

It's about me and my rights. And Paul encourages us here to have a different attitude. In fact, he said in the, in the previous section that we looked at the other day, have the same mindset as Christ.

So what's Christ's mindset like? Was it all me, me, me for Jesus? No. Jesus said the son of man came not to be served, but to serve.

And in fact, to give his life as a ransom for many. God calls his apprentices, the ones who are following him, he calls us to be different from the world.

[15:17] He said, well, how different? You know, many ways we don't look that different. We wear the same clothes, we live in the same houses, we speak the same way as everybody else. How are we to be different?

We're to be different in the sense that we aren't to have a spirit of, of, um, all being about me and what I can get out of life, but a spirit of generosity, a spirit of contentment with the things that God has given us so that we can share with those around us.

Again, let me give some examples. Some people, when I, I'm trying to think about people who, um, who are examples to him about not grumbling or complaining when their lives are tough.

And to be honest, many people who are in this room I thought of for different reasons, but a couple just to share with you. Um, I don't know if you know Andre. Andre's, he's been coming along for a few months really.

If you don't know Andre, get to know Andre. Andre's a good man. I don't know how much you know about Andre's life, but Andre was basically, had to flee Ukraine, um, whenever the war started a few years ago.

[16:28] And, you know, in Ukraine, he was a successful person, he was a successful businessman. He had lots, lots of blessing in his life and, and many of those things have been taken away from him and he, he doesn't have those things anymore.

Now, I've spent quite a lot of time chatting to Andre these last weeks and months and, and all that time, I've, he's never grumbled. He's, he's told me about what's happened, but he's not complained. He's not said how tough his life is. He's just told it as it is, but he's relying on the grace of God. He doesn't want me to feel sorry for him. He just, maybe he wants me to pray for him, but he wants to rely on the grace of God.

Another person that I, I thought of was actually my, my own good lady wife, Becky. Now, most of you probably know that Becky is a doctor.

You might not know that she works in St. John's Hospital in the oncology ward. That means that she takes care of people who are, suffer from cancer. And, and Becky on a, on a daily basis will, will have really hard conversations with people.

[17:33] She will, she will tell people that how long they're going to live for. They've got weeks, months, whatever to live. Now, can you imagine, just put yourself in that perspective that if someone is having that conversation with you, it's probably the worst conversation you'll ever have in your life.

And she probably does that at times, three, four times a day. That's, that's, that is tough. It takes an emotional toll, but I can tell you from my own perspective as Becky's husband that she, she comes home, her, her practice is to, as she walks home, she's got about a 15 minute walk home, she gives all those people over to God in prayer and, and she comes home and she, and she engages as a wife and a mum and, and she doesn't let those things trouble her.

Now, the, the reason why I'm sharing these two people with you isn't because I want you to go, they are so amazing. The, the truth is that they're not, in one sense they are, but in another, they're actually not that amazing.

They're just normal people who've got some really tough things going on and they rely on the grace of God and they do it without grumbling, without arguing, giving those tough things over to God.

I want to encourage you that when you go through tough things, which you surely will, to imitate and to emulate these people who do these things.

[18:52] Now, when I was thinking about this thing of grumbling, how do we grumble? And, one thing that I really thought about was, was, was swearing.

Right? Swearing. It's not often you hear people talk about swearing. One of the reasons you don't hear people talk about swearing very much is, as I was thinking about it, it's actually quite hard to define exactly what a swear word is.

And we don't know one when we hear one. I'm not going to give you a list. But, you'll know when you hear one. And you probably know there's a little bit of a hierarchy about just how offensive certain swear words are.

Again, how we come up with this is, I've absolutely no idea. But nevertheless, we kind of know it. But it is hard to work out. But if I was to tell you that the Bible actually doesn't have a whole lot to say about swearing.

And it really is a cultural thing. But if I was to tell you that in the day in which the Bible was written, one of the most offensive things you could say to anybody, wouldn't be any of the swear words that we could, I wouldn't, but we could rattle off here and now.

[19:56] One of the most offensive things you could say to somebody is to call them a dog. Right? You call them a dog. Now, you might be surprised to know that in chapter 3, Paul does exactly that.

So, so clearly, even in the writing of the Bible, there's, there is a thing about that they, they're not too bothered by offensive words.

You might be surprised to hear me say that because the truth is that I became a Christian when I was about 15 years old and one of the things that did change my life was that I, I, I, I had to stop swearing.

Like, I, it wasn't overnight and I, I mean, you know, I swore just as much as anybody else. You know, I probably wouldn't swear in front of young children, probably wouldn't swear in front of my parents, my teachers, but I would swear in front of everybody else, no problem.

And it, and overnight, without me really thinking about it or being particularly convicted about it, it just changed, my language just, just sort of cleaned up almost by accident. And it's a funny thing because in every other area of sanctification in my life, in so much as God has changed me at all, I can assure you that every single one of those has been hard fought through blood, sweat and tears. [21 : 06] But the swearing thing, it just seemed kind of easy. And I was sort of thinking, well, why is that? Why wasn't it a big deal? And I think something changed deep within me.

This is about the way we swear. So the way we swear, it tends to be, we're not really trying, people when they swear, they're not really trying to insult anybody usually. It's just a background kind of grumbling that goes on.

Everything is F in this and F in that and it, it's just a sort of a form of grumbling. Now, and my language is just the same. Now, I believe, and so go with me on this where I'm going with it.

I believe that God changed that kind of grumbling, isn't it typical? Isn't life rubbish? Isn't it, isn't my life so tough compared to anybody else's sort of attitude, which I and most of the world around me had?

I believe that he changed it into deep inside, a deep, deep level, a joy and a peace, a satisfaction in God, a gratitude for the good things that he has given me.

[22 : 10] Now, again, I don't want to paint too rosy a picture of who I am. I don't jump out of bed every day just and, and shout the praises of the Lord in some kind of happy, clappy way.

I get fed up and annoyed, same as everybody else. But I do believe that what God works in us as we, as he transforms us into his image is a joy and a peace which makes swearing just, just kind of inappropriate.

Now, out of place. Now, I don't particularly want to change anybody here into a nice middle class Christian.

I do want you to be a Christian. I'm not that bothered about you being nice and I'm certainly not remotely bothered about you being middle class. But what I do want you to do is to have a peace in your heart and, and part of that is reflected in the language that you use.

So if you are somebody that you do use swearing probably more than you should, I would question why you do that and ask you to think before God about why you use that language.

[23 : 17] Now, the funny thing is that although this no swearing thing kind of, has kind of happened to me almost accidentally over the years, I would say that it has probably been the main way that I've witnessed about Jesus in my life.

You see, as I mentioned before, I work in the construction industry. As you can imagine, everybody swears all the time but, but I don't when I'm, you know, when I'm out and about and so many people have said to me over the years, I've never heard you swear, why do you not swear?

And I say, well, it's because I'm a Christian and then that usually leads on to other conversations about faith in Jesus. I would encourage you to do the same and I do believe that people will notice that joy and that peace that is deep inside of you.

Okay, so, what happens? That brings me nicely on to the next bit that Paul talks about. He says that when that happens, you will shine like stars among them in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.

Shining like stars. Stars reveal God's glory by being what he made them to be. In the same way, we reveal God's glory by being what he made us to be which is more and more like Jesus as we grow in him.

[24 : 49] This quote is actually from Deuteronomy and you'll know if you remember, we looked at Deuteronomy earlier in the year and Deuteronomy was the long sermon that Moses gave to the people of Israel as they entered the promised land and his call on them consistently was that he wanted them to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation to reveal what God is like to the nations that surrounded the people of Israel as they walked into the promised land.

You know, God has a very similar call for us. To be a believer in Jesus, to be one of his apprentices, if you like, is to show the world what God is like as he transforms us more and more into the likeness of Jesus.

Jesus, the amazing truth is that is for every single one of us. It's not for special Christians or ones who seem to pray more or read the Bible more or anything else.

It's for every single one of us who follow Jesus. What a responsibility, yet what a privilege that is. So what does that mean?

Well, often it means works of service. It means doing stuff. And you know, the funny thing is that service, doing things for other people, is such a witness to the truth of the gospel.

[26 : 25] Because if the gospel is not true, there is no point in serving other people. Maybe your family, your very, very close friends, but beyond that, it's pointless.

Why would you? You have a short life. If this life is all that there is, why on earth would you do anything for anybody else? There's no point. You might as well just enjoy this life as much as you can.

Yet if the gospel is true, then it is the only life that makes sense. Because it is an imitation of the life of Christ.

What did Paul say in just the preceding verses? Christ, who in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but rather he made himself nothing and took the very nature of a servant.

To serve those around you, whether they're believers or non-believers, is to be like Christ and to imitate him. And then finally, it brings us to the end of days.

[27 : 34] Paul says, if you shine like stars in the sky, then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. But even if I'm being poured out like a drink offering and the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I'm glad and rejoice and you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

You see, the truth is that there is a day coming when all of our lives, all of our works, all the things that we've done will come before Jesus.

We want to be ones who, as we approach Christ and as we tell him about the life that we've lived, we want to be ones who he says to, well done, good and faithful servant.

Come and join your master's happiness. And the amazing thing is that there is an invitation to each one of us to do exactly that. He is graceful, he will lead you on, he will be patient with you, but he wants you to do good things for him.

We are Christ's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which he has prepared in advance for us to do. I'm going to leave it there. Would you mind just standing, if you're able to stand, stand with me.

[28 : 56] I'm just going to pray and then we'll finish. Lord Jesus, I want to thank you for the amazing work you did for us on the cross and you continue to do in us to act and to do on your behalf.

I thank you, Lord, that you are working on us, you're making us more and more like you. I pray for my brothers and sisters, I pray for a willing spirit and just a soft heart that we would allow you and invite you to come and model and to change us into your image.

church. We love you, Lord, we thank you for your goodness towards us and we thank you that you do indeed invite us into eternal dwellings if we are willing to walk with you in everything that we do. Hallelujah. Amen. Amen.