



Central Peninsula Church

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Philippians 2:14-18
Justin Buzzard
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Gospel Ministry

SERIES: Philippians: A People and A Place Transformed by the Gospel

Today we're looking at a passage of the Bible that has everything to do with where we live. In order for us to really get this passage, what we first need to do is find out where all of us live. So I've got a survey for us. If you're the kind of person who doesn't like raising your hand in church, you're out of luck this morning. Let's have fun with this! Get mobile in your seats, look around the room, and let's learn a little bit more about each other this morning.

How many of you live in Foster City? Raise your hand. Belmont? San Carlos? Redwood City? Menlo Park/Atherton? San Mateo? Hillsborough/Burlingame? Millbrae? San Bruno? Daly City? South San Francisco? San Francisco? The East Bay? Where else?

So this is where we live—we come from over 20 different cities here on the Peninsula, and some of us even come from Hayward. So this is who we are as a church.

My day this last Friday is an example of this. Last Friday I spent my day working here in Foster City. My day began with a meeting with three people from our church. One of them lives in San Carlos, one lives in Belmont, and the other lives in Los Altos. After that meeting I had another meeting with a fellow staff member who lives in Redwood Shores. Then I checked my email and had messages from two people in our church, one who lives in Mountain View and the other in Daly City. I then sent an email to a person who lives in Menlo Park about an upcoming meeting the twenties group was having in Redwood City.

After work I drove home to San Carlos. I piled my family into our car and we drove North on 280, we saw the exits for Half Moon Bay, but we exited East on the 92. We passed Belmont, merged onto 101 North, took Peninsula Avenue exit in Burlingame, then made a few left turns, passed the border into San Mateo, and arrived at the home of Peter and Jennifer Martin for dinner. And there, at the Martin's home in San Mateo, Jennifer Martin asked me a question that has to do with this Peninsula and that has to do with today's text and has been haunting me for the past week. God kept calling me back to this question and to this moment as I worked on this sermon.

After dinner, as we were sitting in the Martin's living room, Peter asked my wife and I a really thoughtful question. He said, "Justin and Taylor, let's just

say Jennifer and I weren't sitting here right now, what would the two of you be talking about—what would be the big topics or issues that you two are wrestling through right now and trying to figure out?" I had an immediate answer. I said to Peter, in the most humble, life-is-hard type of voice that I could muster, "Well, you know living here can be difficult, and so what we're wrestling with is trying to figure out how to make it, long term, here on the Peninsula." I gave that answer and I really thought, "they're going to feel bad for us—this young family, a new baby, a pastor's salary, they're going to have all this sympathy for us and admire that we're trying to figure out a way to really make it in this place."

That's what I'm thinking inside, and then Jennifer looks at me and says, "Justin, what would it look like for you to make it on the Peninsula?" Basically, what she was asking was, "what's it gonna take for you to be happy here?" And immediately that question began to haunt me. Jen asked the question and my mind went, "it's gonna take more money, a house, and a nice yard with lots of grass to make it here." And as my mind kicked in with this reflex answer, the Holy Spirit began to use Jen's question to haunt me and search me, to get me thinking, "wait, why do I grumble like this, why do I think these are the things that I need to make it here, to be happy here?"

Basically what happened here is Jennifer Martin messed up my life by asking me this question. So, let me mess up your life and ask you the same question. If you're a teenager or if you're well advanced in years or if you're really wealthy, you may not feel this question to the same degree, but this remains a question that every single one of us needs to face: what would it look like for you to make it on the Peninsula? What would it look like for you to be truly happy here? This question needs to haunt us until we can give it a biblical answer.

Today's passage in Philippians answers this question. And I'll tell you right now that the answer will mess up your life. Today's text is about ministry, about committing to a life of ministry where you live. And before God uses ministry to make things better, he first uses it to mess up our assumptions of what "making it" means. So if we're serious about wanting a biblical answer to our question, I believe God's going to use today's text to mess up our lives, and then, after he does that, he'll make them better.

Please turn to Philippians 2:14-18. This is the fourth chunk of instructional material that Paul gives to the church located in the center of the city of Philippi. What Paul calls for here is really an extension of what he's commanded in the passages we've looked at these last three weeks—to live as citizens of the gospel, to have the mind of Christ, and to work out your salvation. Paul shows how the gospel and how these prior commands ought to impact how the Philippians live their lives, how they do ministry, how they “make it,” in the city of Philippi.

“Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 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. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me” (Philippians 2:14–18).

This text gives us four realities of ministry, four realities that God calls you and I to factor into our thinking about what it would look like to make it here on the Peninsula.

I. Ministry Involves a Story (vv. 14-15a)

First reality: We see that ministry involves a story. The first reality of ministry that we must factor into our vision of what it means to make it on the Peninsula is the fact that through the gospel God has called us into a life of ministry that is part of a very old, very big, and very much still alive story.

Our passage begins with a command that taps into a very old ministry story. Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 12:1-3. Many have said that this text is the text that the rest of the Bible expounds. This text is the call of Abram/Abraham. And God's call of Abraham was a call to ministry. Let me read this for you. **“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”**

God called Abraham to go to a new land and be a missionary, to be a blessing to all the families of the earth, to live a life of ministry. From the beginning of our Bibles we see that our God is a missionary God, a God who is all about ministry. Long ago God started a story by calling Abraham to a life of ministry and from

Abraham sprang a nation, a group of people known as Israel, whose existence was for the purpose of doing ministry, being a blessing, to the world.

But what does this have to do with Philippians 2:14, with this command to **“Do all things without grumbling or questioning”**? Where's the story? All I see is a command. Well, with this command Paul is tapping into a story of ministry failure. If you're still in Genesis, turn one book to the right, to Exodus 16:2. **“And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness,...”**. Throughout the book of Exodus this word “grumbling” shows up again and again. We see that Israel, God's people, consistently failed to carry out the ministry God called them to and instead they grumbled, instead they complained against Moses and against God.

Evidently there was some grumbling going on in the Philippian church when Paul wrote this letter. Grumbling, questioning, and complaining is nothing new in church life. And Paul wants to put a stop to this grumbling by *both* commanding the Philippian church to stop it *and* by drawing the Philippians back into this story.

Paul is telling the Philippians that they are the new Israel, a people, Jew and Gentile, who because of the coming of Israel's Messiah and the presence of the Holy Spirit, are now able to do and be what the old nation of Israel failed to do and be. With the coming of Jesus, the ultimate Exodus has occurred. On the cross Jesus came to rescue people *not merely* from slavery in Egypt but from slavery to sin, and to free us for lives of ministry for a life of being a blessing to the world.

This is why Paul uses these three adjectives of innocence in verse 15: “blameless,” “innocent,” and “without blemish.” Blame, lack of innocence, and countless blemishes are exactly what prevented the nation of Israel from carrying out a ministry that truly blessed the world. Exodus from slavery wasn't enough to take away the blemishes. God's people needed an exodus from sin. And in his work on the cross, Jesus accomplished a better exodus, for Jews and Gentiles. Jesus came and took our blemishes away. He came to make us innocent and blameless. As the text says, Jesus has made us “children of God.”

And by tapping into this old, big, continuing story, Paul's commanding the church to not make the same mistake the ancient Israelites made of compromising their ministry through petty grumbling. Paul's saying, “you're at this point in the story—you've experienced a far greater exodus than the ancient Israelites, you've been made blameless children of

God, so you better put your grumbling to a stop, otherwise there's no chance that the city of Philippi will recognize whose children you are."

Fast forward about 2,000 years from when Paul wrote these words and it's still true that our God is a missionary God. It's still true that the story God calls his people to be a part of is a story of ministry unto others. And it's still true that all these years later grumbling gets in the way of ministry.

What do you guys think? Do we have a grumbling problem at CPC? What do we grumble about here? My opinion is that we do have a grumbling problem here and it centers on one issue: growth and change. As God is growing and changing us as a church, many of us are grumbling. As God moves us forward as a church, some of us miss how things used to be back in Egypt where we had our routine, or back in Philippi when the church was small and we knew everybody's name and we were comfortable. And so we grumble. Growth and change sounds like a good idea, until it happens and disrupts what we're used to.

The growth and change that God is doing among us is for the sake of advancing his ministry story. That's the story God is writing, that's the mission he has us on, and he calls us to trust what he's doing among us and to have his heart for ministry. So today, some of you here need to repent of your grumbling. If you're a grumbler, this is what you need to do: repent before God of your grumbling, make things right with anyone here who you've grumbled against, and start obeying Philippians 2:14—start playing your part in this big story of ministry.

One of the things it's going to take for you and me to make it on the Peninsula is for us to get over our grumbling and play our role in God's ministry story.

II. Ministry Involves a Setting (v. 15b)

The second reality we see in this text is that ministry involves a setting. The gospel calls us into lives of ministry that take place in a particular place, in a particular setting. In verse 15, Paul calls the Philippian church to continue the story and carry out their grumble-free lives "in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation." If you have a pen, underline that phrase, "in the midst of." This whole sermon hinges on those four words.

With this phrase, Paul's again alluding to the old, big story of ministry that God's called his people to be a part of. Listen to what Moses said about the Israelites towards the end of his life, this is from Deuteronomy 32:5, "**...they are no longer his [God's] children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation.**" What Paul's saying here is this, "a long time

ago God's people failed at their ministry task because they themselves became a crooked and twisted generation, but you Christians in Philippi, stay true to the ministry task God has given you by living your blameless lives in the midst of the crooked and twisted generation that surrounds you, in the midst of the very crooked and twisted city of Philippi.

We know that Philippi was a crooked and twisted city. If you remember back to Acts chapter 16 which gives the account of Paul's first visit to Philippi, you'll remember that Paul encountered Philippi as a city full of racism, injustice, poverty, greed, and exploitation. This word "twisted" can be translated as "perverted." Basically, Philippi was a city full of crooks and perverts. It was a dark place. Sound similar to the Peninsula?

But Philippi was also a large, important, strategic city. Philippi was the first city that Paul took the gospel to in Europe. Paul chose Philippi as the city for his first church plant on the European continent because Philippi was an important strategic city.

Philippi was just a few miles from the bustling ports on the Aegean Sea, so the city had easy access to trade and travel. Philippi was stationed on the center of the main Roman highway system—it was a city whose roads lead throughout Europe and to the heart of Europe's largest city, Rome. Philippi was also a Roman colony, a great city with a large population and with a lot going on. As Acts 16 tells us, Philippi was a "leading city" of the area. What happened in Philippi—it's ideas, inventions, and culture—quickly spread throughout the country. Sound similar to the Peninsula?

Paul and the earliest Christians had this habit, this resolve, to bring the gospel, do ministry, and plant churches in the midst of strategic, influential cities. Christianity began as an urban movement. Most of the New Testament letters are addressed to churches in cities. That's because these early Christians believed that if you took the gospel to cities, to large population centers, you could influence a whole region. They believed that if you planted churches in large cities you would get more people and more influence, and if you influence the city you'll eventually influence every place else—what you do in the city will eventually trickle out to the rest of the world.

The word "pagan" actually comes from the Latin word "paganus" which means "country dweller." Today we call people who reject God "pagans" because during Christianity's first few centuries,

Christian leaders focused on infecting the cities of the Roman Empire with the gospel and the country dwellers caught on to this message of salvation later than the city dwellers. And so, the country dwellers were called pagans.

In about 140 A.D. a letter was written to an official in the Roman government telling him about this approach Christians took towards the city. This letter, known as the "Letter to Diognetus," gives us a peek at how these early Christians sought to live lives of ministry in the midst of cities. The letter reads: "Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or custom. They do not live in cities of their own; they live in Greek and barbarian cities alike, as each man's lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living, at the same time they give proof of the remarkable constitution of their own commonwealth...They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven...To put it simply: What the soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world."

It's from this letter that we get the notion of Christians being the "soul of the city." By living in the midst of crooked and twisted cities like Philippi, these Christians were simply following Jesus' teaching to live *in* the world, but not *of* the world. They saw the city as the best place to do what Jesus called them to do.

So, as you think about what it will take for you to make it on the Peninsula, I want you to see what a strategic place **this** setting is, the Peninsula, for doing ministry.

We live in a unique part of the world, a narrow strip of land that, according to the last census, is comprised of a 99% urban population. There are well over 20 cities here on the Peninsula that in effect string together to make one big city. That's how I'd encourage you to view the Peninsula—as one big, sprawling city. The population of San Mateo County, which forms the heart of our Peninsula, is 700,000. Most of us here are a part of this San Mateo County 700,000. According to some data we have here at the church, the top six cities represented at CPC are, first Foster City, then San Mateo, Redwood City, Burlingame/Hillsborough, Belmont, and San Carlos. We're not a Foster City church, we're a Peninsula church, hence the name. But many of you come from San Francisco, the city of 740,000 at the tip of the Peninsula, and many of you come from 1.7 million Santa Clara County just south of the Peninsula. And some of you come from the East Bay.

We live in an urban, densely populated area that's significantly influencing the rest of the world. We're certainly not the largest city in the world. What's the largest city in the world? Tokyo, with a population of 25

million. We're not the largest city in the world, but we're one of the most strategic and influential cities in the world.

Last year's most successful start up company, a company that millions of people from every corner of the globe use every single day, got started here in San Mateo and its offices are now in San Bruno. What company am I talking about? YouTube. And another example, this month's edition of *Wired* magazine named the 40 most influential and innovative companies in the world—the top 3 are all right here in the Bay Area. What is happening here is influencing the whole world.

And so when you think about making it here on the Peninsula, you need to factor in what a strategic setting this is for doing ministry. Sure, you could move to Tulsa and afford a big home with a big yard and maybe a big cow, but living in the midst of Tulsa isn't going to give you the same ministry opportunities as living in the midst of the Peninsula. Someday God may call you to Tulsa or to somewhere else, any place where there are people needing Christians, but right now God has called you to live here and making it here means living and doing ministry in the midst of a very strategic setting.

III. Ministry Involves a Shining (vv. 15c-16a)

The third reality of ministry that we see in this text is that ministry involves a shining. We're not called merely to live in the midst of the Peninsula; we're called to shine in the midst of the Peninsula. We're called to shine in the dark. That's what Paul called the Philippians to do. In verse 15 he calls this church to "shine as lights in the world" in Philippi.

This is the same thing Jesus said to his disciples, remember? He told his disciples, "You are the light of the world." Notice that neither Jesus nor Paul commanded the people to shine as lights. They simply said you *are* lights, you *will* shine as a result of being yourself, being a Christian, in the midst of a dark and crooked world.

Most scholars think that when Paul says "lights" here in verse 15 he's thinking of stars because of the particular word he uses. In Paul's day, what were bright stars used for? For navigation, on both land and sea. Before compasses and GPS, a shining star is what you needed to find your way home. Paul's telling us that as we shine in the midst of this place, we're leading people home. Our presence on the Peninsula exposes the darkness that people are living in and leads them home—to Jesus.

Our Peninsula is a crooked and twisted place that needs a lot of shining if the darkness is going to

begin to lift here. Studies show that our Peninsula is 93% un-churched. There are roughly 200 churches in San Mateo County. That means we have 1 church per every 3,500 people here. That's a dark ratio. In 1820, there was a church for every 875 Americans. And from 1860-1906, pastors and church planters and congregations saw the growing American frontier as a mission field and a new church was planted for every population increase of 350. By 1900 we had 1 church in America for every 430 people. But after WWI church planting dropped off in America and now, here on the Peninsula, we have just 1 church for every 3,500 people. Less than 7% of our population is involved with a church—that's well below the national average. And Foster City, where we're located, is far below this average. There are 4 Protestant churches in Foster City. That's just 1 church for every 7,500 people in Foster City.

And the statistics are even worse than this because many of the churches we have here are dying and declining. Approximately 3,500 churches close and die every year in America. The average size of a church in America is just 80 people and that average is lowering. And of the roughly 200 churches here in San Mateo County, a number of them have forsaken the biblical gospel and they're no longer shining as lights here. They've become crooked and twisted themselves. These churches have forgotten to do what Paul talks about in verse 16, and that's "holding fast to the word of life"—holding fast to the gospel. As an individual or as a church, if you try to live in the midst of this place without holding fast to the gospel, you'll become enveloped by darkness.

Most church planting organizations say that if you really want to change a place, if you really want to change a city, if you really want to shine like a star and call your city home to Jesus, you've got to have 1 church for every 1,000 people in your community. To do that here on the Peninsula we'd need to plant about 500 churches. That's how dark this place is. That's how much shining we have to do here.

As you think about what it might look like for you to make it here on the Peninsula, God wants you to factor in your shining. If you're a Christian, you are the light of the world and this place needs a lot of light. And this starts not with planting churches, but with loving your neighbors.

A few months ago God began to convict me of how I didn't know any of my neighbors in the condo complex where I live. In fact, God began to show me that my life was so full of being at church and being around Christians, that I had very few non-Christian friends. So my wife and I repented of how we hadn't been loving our neighborhood, how we hadn't been shining in the midst

of where we live and then what we did was throw a party for our neighbors. We invited about 15 of our nearest neighbors into our home for some food and drinks and conversation and we just had a great time. And what this one little step has done for us is open a small door of ministry, one little patch of darkness where we can shine. Since that one little party we've had so many opportunities to be in the midst of our neighbors' lives and love them and attempt to shine them towards Christ. We do need to figure a way to plant about 500 more churches on the Peninsula, but while we figure that out, all of us can peel back the darkness here simply by taking a step or two into the lives of our neighbors.

IV. Ministry Involves a Sacrifice (v. 16b-18)

The fourth and final reality of ministry that we see in this text is that ministry involves a sacrifice. Paul and the Philippians made sacrifices to carry out their ministry in the midst of Philippi. Paul, when he first entered the city of Philippi, was falsely accused, beaten, and thrown into prison. In these final verses of the text Paul uses three metaphors to describe his ministry. He likens his ministry to a race, to a job, and to a sacrifice. Look at verse 17. Paul talks about his life being poured out as a drink offering. He's saying his life is one great ministry sacrifice. And it's true. Ministry is what eventually killed Paul—he sacrificed his life in order to see others saved.

Paul also describes the Philippians' ministry as a sacrifice. He talks about the "sacrificial offering" of their faith in Philippi. We don't know all of the ways that the Philippians sacrificed, but we do know that it cost this church comfort, money, time, and it probably cost some people their lives in order to shine in the midst of Philippi.

Given where we are at in God's big ministry story, given our setting, given how much shining this place needs, we're going to have to sacrifice. This place is a mission field. Many of you have already made major sacrifices to make it here, and many of us will be called to make more sacrifices to make it here.

I'll tell you what sacrifice has meant for me lately. I've been realizing that if I want to make it long term in this setting, some of my dreams are going to have to die. This has not been easy for me. It's still not easy. I'm still working through a lot of this. The particular housing dream I have here in my head—that's dying. The particular vacation dreams, savings account dreams I've had—those are dying. The dream of my wife not having to work once she gave birth to our first kid—that dream died five

months ago, even though the church takes great care of us. For this particular season of life, like most of you here, my spouse is working in order for us to make it. And my dream of living a relaxed pace life—that's long gone.

Now it's not easy for me to ask you this, but I have to ask because our text raises the question. As you think through what it would look like to make it here, what dreams of yours are going to have to die?

The good news is that along with the death of some of our dreams, making it here means that we're going to experience the birth of new dreams. In verses 17–18, right as Paul's talking about sacrifice, he uses joy language four times. In fact, in verse 18 Paul commands the Philippians to have joy, he commands them to rejoice and be glad. He's telling them that their sacrifice is to be a joyful sacrifice. He's telling them that their joy and their dreams are now to be reoriented by God, reoriented around what God wants them to do in Philippi.

I've been slowly finding that as I join up with all of you to shine in the midst of this crooked and twisted and wonderful place, God's giving me new dreams. He's giving me joy in new places—deeper joy, better joy, joy that I wouldn't know without sacrifice. I won't tell you all these new dreams that are beginning to fill my head, but I'll tell you about one of them. That's seeing this place change, seeing this Peninsula shine. That's this dream of grabbing a hold of Vision 2010 with all of you and making it happen, planting a new church or maybe 500 new churches so that thousands of people in this place would call upon the name of Jesus, and trust him, and enjoy him, and lift his name high so that this place shines. That's the dream that's keeping me up at night.

God has put us here on the Peninsula, *not* to make it for ourselves, but to make it for others. We are here *not* to get, but to give. If we're serious about the gospel, if we're serious about this text, if we're serious about joy, then the answer to Jennifer Martin's question is this: making it on the Peninsula means making a joyful sacrifice for others. That's what making it here looks like.

CONCLUSION

The only reason we can make a joyful sacrifice in the midst of this city is because someone else made a joyful sacrifice in a different city. It's Palm Sunday today. On this day, many years ago, Jesus Christ entered a great city. And a few days later, on a hill overlooking Jerusalem, Jesus made a joyful sacrifice. He stretched out his arms on a cross as a sacrifice for a crooked and twisted city. The book of Hebrews says that it was "for the joy that was set before him" that Jesus made this sacrifice. Jesus made THE joyful sacrifice for us so that we can now make a joyful sacrifice for others here on the Peninsula.

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