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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

December 13, 2020

Paul's Imperatives and Indicatives

Philippians 2:14-15

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we thank you for this incredible gift of Christmas. We thank you for the season that where folks are actually tuned in a little bit more to what it is you've done. And Lord, again we just thank you for the gift that you've given us 52 weeks of the year and that is your word and your Holy Spirit. And Lord, we just want to continue to open up that gift. We want to continue to grow in our understanding of who you are and what you've done in our lives. And so we pray this morning as we go back to your book, go back to the letter that Paul has written to the Philippian church, that you would give us the grace, the insight, and the wisdom that only your Holy Spirit can give and that it would be of lasting value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Philippians 2 says this, this is verse 14, it says: Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God. This is what we spoke about last time out, we spoke about grumbling and disputing. And grumbling is just

what it sounds like, it's that low murmuring that you do when you're not happy with your circumstances. Grumble is how you feel towards God when you believe he hasn't treated you well. Disputing is taking up an argument with or about God, like he doesn't care for us or he has no idea what he's doing. Grumbling and disputing are both internal sins, that is they speak to our attitudes, they don't speak to our behavior but the way we think. And as such they are an accurate barometer of the health of our relationship with God and that health is a function of understanding the difference between imperatives and indicatives. Let me just explain.

Paul's statement here starts out with the imperative. He says *do all things without grumbling or disputing* and then he finishes up with a number of indicative statements. He says *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*. Now I've spoken before about these two types of sentences and how you understand them, that can actually define the difference between believers and unbelievers, between sheep and goats. If you go back to your high school days, you remember there's different kinds of sentences and two different kinds of sentences are indicative sentences and imperative sentences. Indicative sentences merely point things out, that is they indicate. That's why they're indicative. Imperatives are

commands. They tell you something you must do. And until you understand the difference between the indicatives and the imperatives of the gospel, you will have a hard time understanding just what Paul is getting at here. You see if you think that you are under orders from Paul not to grumble or dispute, well you're not thinking like a true believer in Christ thinks, you're thinking more about religion than you are about relation. If you think only in terms of imperatives, that is in terms of commands, then you're going to see your Christian life as a series of rules and regulations that you are commanded to follow. If, however, you begin to think of the indicatives, then you're operating on the very same level that Christ operates on. When Jesus says in *John 10*: "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me,*" he's not issuing a command, he's not issuing an imperative, he's stating an indicative. He's indicating what sheep do. That's an incredibly important distinction to understand because that's exactly what Paul is doing in our passage this morning. He's stating an imperative and then he's refining that statement with a series of indicatives. Again, this is what he says: *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.*

Now both Jesus and Paul are describing the type of person who has come through the process that we talk about all of the time that's described in Ezekiel. Just to recapitulate, *Ezekiel 36* says: *And I will give you a new heart -- this is God speaking -- and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* What that's saying is that when you are born again God gives you a brand new heart and he puts a brand new spirit inside you. Ezekiel describes the process. God takes the old heart out and the new heart that he puts in is a heart that's filled with his Holy Spirit. And that surgical operation results in a brand new creature who now has a very different constitution. *2 Corinthians* says: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* You see, because the Holy Spirit is now inside them, this person now wants to walk in God's statutes, and that can only be done by those that God has freely given the ability and the desire to. Jesus calls them his sheep. And he says in verse 27: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."* That's an indicative. Jesus is indicating what sheep are like. Their new default drives follow Jesus by carefully considering God's rules. These are now the things, they're part of those things that please and drive this new creature internally. It's now part of his new constituent

nature. To put it in the indicative, following Jesus by loving God's word and wanting on a gut level to be obedient to it is now an indication that you're one of these new creatures. The problem is we often frame these things not in terms of indicatives but in terms of imperatives. If you want to be one of Christ's sheep, you've got to follow him. Well that's an imperative, that's a command. And if you see it only as a command to obey you might be asking, okay, how much do I have to follow him? And just what level of disobedience to following is necessary to push me out? It completely misses the point that Jesus's followers follow because they want to. You can force people on the outside to conform and obey but you can never force them on the inside to want to. Jesus was constantly confronted with people who were willing to force the outside while the inside had no desire at all. I mean, that's what the Pharisees did. That's what they excelled in. And what you've got with that is what we call "religion." Jesus said of it in *Matthew 15: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."*

You know, much of the blame for that vain worship could be laid at the feet of the religious leaders who drove the people in terms of imperatives. And they had no shortage of religious commands, no shortage of rules that you had to comply with in order to be right

with God. Not much has changed in the last 2,000 years. We still have religion telling us what we must do, the imperative as opposed to the indicative, which simply indicates just what a new creature in Christ is and does. New creatures in Christ obey Christ because they love him. They have a new heart that's been planted literally within them by God. And because of that new heart, obedience now comes naturally to this new creature. Listen to how Paul describes this in the opening chapter of his letter to the church that has now been scattered. This is *1 Peter 1*, he says this. He says: *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ: To the temporary residents dispersed in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father and set apart by the Spirit for obedience and for sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied to you.* Peter says these born again believers have been set apart by whom? By the Holy Spirit. But what have they been set apart for? Peter says they are set apart for obedience. What Peter is saying is that God places within his sheep a brand new desire to obey God and his word. And that drive, that desire to obey is now part of the internal default mechanism that every child of God now possesses. And so he obeys now not because he has to but because he wants to. When Paul says *"do all things without grumbling or disputing,"* he's speaking to believers whose desire to obey outweighs their desire to complain.

Now do believers ever grumble, do they ever dispute? Well of course they do. I mean we're human and so we still sin. And *1 John 1* says: *If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.* The difference here is not that we sin, the difference is in our desires. God's Holy Spirit is now living within us changing our desires, lining them up more and more with that of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just think of how God uses desire in the life of the creatures that he's created. Think of geese for a second. I mean geese are creatures that have built into their programming this desire to fly south in the winter. Now there's two ways to think of how a goose might think of that arduous trip. There's an imperative way of thinking about it. And the imperative way of thinking, the goose is pacing back and forth and he's thinking about the energy and the risk and the cold and the distance this thousand mile journey that he's got to take. He's constantly thinking is he going to be in the back of the flock, is he going to be in the front? How long it's going to take and what he has to do to keep up with his fellow geese because he's got to fly south. Is that how geese think? I mean I can only guess, obviously, I've never been a goose. I can only guess but I don't think so. I think those thoughts never enter into a goose's mind. That's the imperative way of thinking. I think a goose operates completely on an indicative level. I

think he operates just like sheep do, they follow their instinct. And so when the days get shorter and the days get colder, there's a drive within a goose that says, "Hey, let's go south." In fact I would go so as far to say that God designed geese so that being obedient to the drive to fly south gives them more pleasure than not, and that's why he goes. I mean I think he's up there flying and honking because the drive that God puts in him makes it so it's what he wants to do.

Well Jesus use sheep as his example. What he was trying to get at, basically the very same thing, I mean, born again believers in Christ have this brand new drive placed within them that makes obedience the new default drive pleasure that never existed before. So much so that God can say of his sheep: *"My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me."* That's an indicative. Now are sheep following the shepherd for any other reason than that they want to? I mean is it not because that is our pleasure, their desire? I mean do you think the sheep are following the shepherd saying, you know, "Dang, I hate this. I would much rather be following somebody else or doing nothing but because I'm under this command, this imperative, this rule, I have no choice, so I guess I'll follow him." Well, scratch a religious person and that's exactly what you're going to find. You'll find external compliance covering internal rebellion. That's why God hates religion. I

mean it's far more simple and far more reasonable to assume that sheep follow the shepherd as an indicative because that's what sheep do. They hear that master's voice and then they follow him.

Jesus goes on to say that the decision to become a sheep, that's not one made by the sheep, it's one that's made by the shepherd. This is what Jesus says of his sheep in *John 10*. He says: "*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*" So to understand what this means, what God is saying here is I'm the one who makes the sheep. And furthermore, when I make you one of my sheep, no one, no one can unmake you or snatch you out of my hand or snatch you out of my Father's hand. So when you start wondering whether or not you've been obedient enough, realize that that's not really the right question. You're confusing imperatives and indicatives all over again. The question is not have I obeyed the commands enough in order to cross that threshold of officially becoming a sheep, it's much more simple than that. The question really is: Am I one of his sheep? Have you ever asked yourself that question?

Let's apply that question to Paul's statement in our text this morning. This is the text. He says: *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.

Now obviously the first part of that statement is an imperative, it's a command. He says, "do all things without grumbling and disputing" but next come the indicatives. Remember, indicative statements point things out, they indicate. Okay. Paul says don't grumble or dispute but there's a giant "because," because blameless and innocent children of God without blemish don't grumble and don't dispute. And when they do they feel like geese that have been grounded, they feel like sheep without a shepherd, they know something is wrong because their desires are now being reconfigured by the Lord Jesus Christ.

So how does one get to a state where he or she is now blameless and innocent without even a blemish when God says emphatically in *Romans 3: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

How do you get to that state? Well, first you become a child of God, you become one of his sheep, and that happens when you are born for a second time. This time not of flesh, everybody's born of flesh, it's the stuff that we came from your mom and dad. Now you have to be born of the spirit. And we have an example of somebody learning this, poor Nicodemus. This is poor Nicodemus and how he learned how to become a child of God. If you remember,

Nicodemus was this great teacher in Israel. And he was part of the old guard, he was part of the Pharisees who understood their relationship to God strictly in terms of imperatives, there are rules, and these are the rules you have to follow if want to be in good stead with God, if you want to be worthy. Well, Nicodemus, he snuck out one night to meet Jesus because God had been moving in his life. God was opening his eyes and his ears to the fact that this rebel preacher that he had heard about was in fact the Son of God. So Nicodemus is compelled by God to seek Jesus out, and when he does, he finds Jesus to be far more than he bargained for. This is the account in *John 3*. It says: *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." So Jesus tells Nicodemus that being born again requires being born of the Holy Spirit, something God alone can do. He goes on to say in verse 6: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you,*

'You must be born again.'" But then Jesus tells Nicodemus that human beings have nothing to do with their own salvation and that being born again is a product of the Holy Spirit who he describes to Nicodemus as the wind. He goes on to say, he says in verse 8: *"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."* Now none of this makes any sense at all to Nicodemus who as a pharisee has been raised with the idea of imperatives and not indicatives. I mean he can only understand God at this point as religion, as a series of things that you have to do, as commands that you have to follow. He doesn't get -- in his idea the heart has very little to do with it. But Nicodemus is an exception to the pharisees here because Jesus is literally pulling him into the kingdom. In verse 9 it says: *Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"* Well the heavenly thing that Jesus reveals to Nicodemus is the one verse that's been heard literally around the world, it's *John 3:16*. He says it four verses later. He says: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not*

perish but have eternal life." And what Jesus is doing here, he's explaining to Nicodemus that being blameless and innocent involves first being born a second time, being born again, something that God's Holy Spirit alone can accomplish. *The wind blows where it wishes,* not where we wish it. And if your heart has been touched and your eyes and your ears have been opened, it's because the Holy Spirit has done a work in your life.

So we ask, okay, so how does being born again make you blameless? How does it make you innocent? Well that leads to another big Christian word and that word is "justification." *Romans 3* says this, it says: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* That's God saying when that happens, when you are actually born again, God declares that you are justified. What does that mean? Well, my working definition of justification is that it's a declaration by God to himself, it's by God to God that on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross, the just demands of the law have now been fully met. You might say what does that mean? Well, let me put it in its simplest terms. It may be helpful to go back to the way checking accounts used to operate. We used to receive -- if you remember back in the day, you used to get your monthly statement and get out your checkbook and spend hours and hours trying to balance your debits and your credits.

You know, if you deposited \$100 and you spent \$100, your checkbook would consider to be balanced and there's a legal term for it, it's considered "justified." And what "justified" means is that your credits and your debits, they all match. When God says that we are "justified," what he's announcing is the debt of our sin, this debt has accumulated from the moment of our birth to our death as a debt, that that debt has been matched with a credit and the credit is Christ's payment of our sin debt on the cross.

You see there's a cosmic law governing the universe that many people either consciously or unconsciously ignore and it's as basic as Newton's third law of physics. It says for every action there is a reaction. There's a spiritual law that's just as unbreakable that says in *Romans 6: The wages of sin is death*. That's the debt. And as sure as physics describes the physical universe, so this scripture describes a spiritual universe that says that nothing happens in a vacuum and it tells us that every sin you ever commit, ever, will require payment either from you or from someone who is willing and able to pay your account. And now there's only two people capable of paying that account. One is you, it's you or me and the other is a perfect God man who came to bear that very sin. And all of life's choices will come down to who you decide who is going to pay that debt, you or him. Justification is a declaration by God that your debt has been paid in full by Jesus

Christ. *Romans 6:23* says: *For the wages of sin is death, but -- that's a huge but -- but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

You know in May of 1973 I was born again and it was solely by the grace of God, and at that moment that I was born again, I was fully justified. That is to say that all of my sins, past, present and future were fully and finally paid for by Christ. And I genuinely think we have a hard time with that notion. We have a hard time grappling with the idea that our forgiveness is a once and for all forgiveness. I think most of us can accept the idea of being born again and Christ having paid the price of our sin up to the moment that we recognize how desperately sinful we are and we turn to God in repentance, but then somehow or other we think that we are to spend the rest of our lives trying to co-pay the debt with Christ. And that, folks, is a fool's errand. The fact is what Paul stated at the beginning of this message is actually true for those who have born a second time. You see, in God's eyes we are now truly and forever blameless and innocent. Why? Because Christ has paid our sin debt in full. We are without blemish because Jesus, having justified us, is constantly sanctifying us. God says in *Ephesians 5: Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the*

church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So having justified us by paying the debt of our sin, God is now about the task of transforming us each into a living unique image of his Son. We quote Romans 8:28 all the time because it reminds us that nothing, nothing in our lives happens without a purpose. But we also need to keep reminding ourselves that God's ultimate purpose is to have every single event that happens in our life have one aim, one goal, one possible direction and that is to shape and mold us uniquely into the image of his Son. I mean it's one thing to know that all things work together for good, it's another thing to realize what the good that God is talking about here. It's being conformed to a living unique representation of Jesus Christ. Romans 8:28 says: And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. Folks, that's why we're here. And if you remember the context that Paul is getting at here, what he's telling us is to work out the faith that God has worked in us in the first place. And he's giving us a set of imperatives that can only be accomplished if you are what the indicatives say you are.

Let me just repeat the whole statement that Paul makes. He says

this in *Philippians 2:12*. He says: *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. 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 is starting off giving us our marching orders. He's giving us imperatives. He's telling us to work out the faith that God has worked in you and do all things without grumbling and disputing. But then he follows that up with a series of facts that can be described as our indicatives, what it means to be born again. But then he goes on to describe what our purpose on earth is here for. He said, having been made blameless and innocent children of God without blemish by what Christ has done in us, Paul points out that we are placed in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation in order to shine as lights in the world. If you notice, Paul has shifted from imperatives to indicatives. Paul isn't ordering us to be blameless or be innocent children of God without blemish, he's telling us we already are blameless, that we already are innocent and that we are children of God without blemish, not for anything that we have done but for what Christ has done in us. And because of that in God's eyes our debt has been paid for in full, and having had that debt

paid in full we now can shine like stars in the sky. Again, that's not what we do, that's who we are. Jesus couldn't have made it any clearer when he said in *Matthew 5:14*, he says: "*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*" And once again we see a pattern of imperatives and indicatives. I mean, at this time Christ gives us first the indicatives. He says, "*You are the light of the world.*" That's followed by an imperative, "*Let your light so shine.*" Our lives are supposed to so reflect a Christ who is now living within us that we offer consistent testimony to the wonder of Jesus not just by what we do but also about what we say. I think that's something that's just disappeared these days. You can't give glory to God for your good works unless you tell them why your light is shining.

You know there's a popular saying, it's been popular for centuries now and it's attributed falsely to St. Francis of Assisi, who said, "Preach the gospel at all times and if you must, use words."

What's that cleverly trying to say is that all you need to do is just let the gospel shine in the way that you act without needing words. And if you must, use words. The problem is if you don't

use words you can't really preach the gospel. I mean in Romans 10 Paul lists a series of questions concerning preaching the gospel and he raises this very question, he says: *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?* So the point is we're placed in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation in order to shine as lights in the world by speaking out loud of the Jesus we worship. I mean it's funny that this quote is attributed to St. Francis because one of the main things that he was actually known for was his preaching. Mark Galli is the editor of *Christianity Today* and he wrote a biography of St. Francis, and this is what he said. He said: *"Our man clearly spent a great deal of time using his words when he preached, 'Sometimes preaching in up to five villages a day, often outdoors. In the country, Francis often spoke from a bale of straw or a granary doorway. In town, he would climb on a box or up steps in a public building. He preached to any who gathered to hear the strange but fiery little preacher from Assisi.' He was sometimes so animated and passionate in his delivery that 'his feet moved as if he were dancing.'"*

You know who Francis was? Francis was a blameless and innocent child of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom he shined as lights in the world, not by

virtue of what Francis did but by virtue of what Christ did in Francis, so much so that he couldn't keep silent. You see, every one of us has a ministry and we all share one thing in common. We, every one of us who are his sheep, we are all walking indicatives. Our lives are to indicate the humility, the grace, the sacrifice, the glory and the love of Jesus Christ. We tend to forget those words that Jesus said to Nicodemus about himself, he said: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."* I mean, here's God the Son explaining to Nicodemus that God the Father loved him so much, loved the world so much, that he willingly allowed his Son, his only Son, to be sacrificed on our behalf, and the one telling him that was the very one who was going to be sacrificed. You see the more you learn about Jesus, the more in love with him you must grow. But here's the point, you have to work at it. I mean we can't help but have this stilted, distorted understanding of who Jesus was because our perspective is shrouded. Our perspective is shrouded because we are sinners saved by grace. And you know it's incredibly easy for us to think of Jesus as ransoming and rescuing us but finding our sinfulness yucky, kind of repulsive. I mean scripture says we were God's enemy. And so I think it's easy to think that the best we could hope for would be treated maybe like a prisoner of war, you know, maybe like a former enemy, you know, somebody that's hopefully treated with some

dignity and respect, at most tolerance, but certainly not affection. Jesus loves me, this I know. Yeah, but does he like me? I think we kind of doubt it. But Jesus' great love, it turns out, is turning former enemies into holy and blameless testimonies of his grace. Listen to what *Colossians 1:21* says. It says: *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.* You get that from scripture. If you really want to get an accurate picture of who Jesus is, you have to plumb the depths of scripture. And when you do that, you find out who Jesus really liked hanging around. You find out the people who Jesus actually sought out as friends. He tells us the people that he actually was attracted to. This is what he says in *Matthew 5*, he says: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Folks, that's folks who know that they stand before God tapped out, flat broke, having absolutely nothing of any spiritual value. Jesus also said in *Matthew 5:4*: *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.* And again, those are those who know that their sin has separated them from a holy God and they mourn with a Godly sorrow. They have a hard time imagining a God loving or even liking them. Then they discover in scripture a Jesus described by his enemies as a friend of tax collectors and sinners, a servant who refused to cling to his status as co-equal with God, who left heaven itself

and took on flesh like we celebrate each Christmas season. As Jude says, *all glory, dominion, majesty and power belong to him* but because of his great love for us and his determination to glorify his Father, he gave them up to take on the role that we celebrate at Christmas, and of a squawling baby born in a manger. He then went on to live his life in complete obedience to his earthly parents so that he could grow up and live out his life as our perfect high priest, the holy One who has been tempted in every way as we are but without sinning. And then he brought that perfect life to a cross in order to offer it as a sacrifice and substitute for our life of sin. As Paul says: *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* So the ultimate servant was also a savior who sought us out, who pursued friendship with us in spite of the fact that we wanted nothing to do with him. So the more we learn of him, the more we realize that we can't keep silent about this man. So Paul tells us we are to shine like *a blameless and innocent, child of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.* And we do that not because we have to but because we want to. I mean the more we know this friend, this savior, this servant, the less we can stay silent when confronted with the loveliness and the beauty of the God who came to rescue us. I mean if you put Peter and Paul's words together, they're describing someone who's not at all

driven by imperatives, he's not under a command, he's not under orders, he's not doing things to earn his way into heaven, rather he's so overwhelmed with the fact that God made him blameless and innocent and without blemish and placed him squarely in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation that he wants nothing more than to tell that crooked and twisted generation about what God has done. Listen to Peter describe the very same thing. This is 1 Peter 2:9. He says: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

Now is that an indicative that describes you? You can proclaim his excellencies not out of an imperative commanding you to but because your greatest joy, your deepest pleasure is found right there. That's an indication, an indicative, if you will, that you're one of his sheep and that you're healthy. Now if you find no desire to just share Christ as the love of your life, maybe you need to ask yourself, am I one of his sheep? If you have any of those doubts, you can take that time right now to ask God to take control of your heart, to ask God to begin to fill it to bursting so that it can't help but overflow, as Paul has described in our text this morning. Listen to what Jesus said in *Matthew 7*. He said: *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will*

be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." So if you want that kind of heart, all you have to do is ask. Ask God that the imperatives of religion give way to the indicatives of his sheep. 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. Let's pray.

Father, we want to do just that. We want to shine, and we recognize, every one of us here recognize that we are living in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. And Lord, we have a unique opportunity once a year, once a year people soften ever so slightly and give perhaps opportunity to speak of the hope that we have within us, of the glory of this man Jesus who died for us. I pray that you would fill our hearts to bursting, that we can't stay silent, that by your grace, your insight, your wisdom we have opportunity to share the good news with those who are still in the darkness, who are still part of this crooked generation. Give us that grace, give us that power, give us that courage, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.