

Sermon Text for April 18, 2021

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Proverbs 22: 17-21, Philippians 4:8-9

“You are what you think”

It is great to be able to be surprised by joy again today in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. Paul writing to a church that he knows and that he loves and to people who were very special in his heart, people that he had done life together with and that they had experienced joys and trials together. I think it was about 20 years ago when the three of us have worshipped together in a church where I was the pastor, it was back in Florida, we were gathered for our annual Bronkema family golf tournament. This week we have our first annual Bronkema Olympics.

Paul in his writings consistently says something that is very dangerous, he says use my example in determining how you ought to live your life. Yes, absolutely follow Jesus' example, but if that is too esoteric and not earthy enough for you, then look at my life. I think of the examples that my brothers have set for me as I was growing up. I could get away with anything because the path that they paved for me was one of trust and everyone loved them, it didn't take long for me to break that down. But my big brother David was one that growing up I always admired and respected and thought he could do no wrong. I certainly did not want to disappoint him so much of what I did was a result of trying to make sure he was pleased with what I was doing.

John, my brother closest in age was my protector. He paved the way for me in Middle School and in high school, all people had to say was that this is John's brother and everything instantly changed. He and his reputation literally kept me safe in high school in situations that could have turned pretty ugly. The examples that these brothers of mine set for me were exemplary, seriously, they really were. But just because you have the examples in front of you does not mean that you are going to follow that example.

Paul and Solomon tell their respective people in the Scriptures that we have in front of us: follow my example, follow that example that I have set for you, keep doing the things you've seen me do. Solomon tells his readers think about and apply your mind to my teaching. Now, without a doubt that battle between nature and nurture I give the edge to our environment as the leading role in what we become. We are what we experience.

Scripture also says that we are what we think, we become what we fill our minds with, so fill them with that which is of God. Fill your minds with that which contributes to the kingdom of God and does not tear it down. As we find ourselves in the most unique time that any of us have ever faced individually and collectively our Scripture today asks us repeatedly: what are we thinking of during this time? What is driving our thoughts?

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As I shared in my enews a little over a week ago, an enews, by the way, that has elicited the most response out of any that I have written, I continue to struggle and wrestle with this whole concept of being a follower of Jesus Christ and the tension that comes out of the necessity of believing the right things and teaching the right things about Jesus Christ. Someone wrote to me this past week that sometimes theology gets in the way of discipleship. I am not a deconstructionist. I believe orthodoxy in Christian thought is important and I try to preach that orthodoxy. But praxis, and living out your Christian faith is a necessary, not an optional, but a necessary component to being a disciple. As James states you can't just believe without acting on your faith. It doesn't work that way.

Sometime we think that salvation is a final step in our relationship with Jesus. I have a personal relationship with my Savior and so now that is all that matters. Hear me correctly here, a personal relationship is necessary, but it does not end there. Following Jesus actually involves living your life as a follower and living your life according to the example set by our Savior.

In Sunday School last week we mentioned the scandal that is a reality within the Christian church and that is it is easily pointed out that there are those who call themselves Christian and yet do not act in a way that pleases Christ. It is public from pastors who require their members to contribute to their own personal bank accounts, to sexual scandals, to power grabs and political alignments that are embarrassing. Hypocrisy, we discussed, is probably the primary factor that turns young families away from the church. Why get caught up in that drama when I have enough drama happening at home?

We find in our culture people who do not profess to be disciples in Jesus Christ and yet are involved in the most life giving work without even mentioning the name of our Savior. An example of this is our newest partner, Mitzvah Moms. This is not a Christian organization, but it is doing work here in our local community that ought to make us proud to be partnering with them. You can come up with your own example where those outside of the church who do not profess to be disciples of Jesus Christ are involved in work that is life giving but does not find its

source or energy from where we find our source or energy. We ought to be the ones setting the example, but often because of our constant stumbling, we find ourselves patching ourselves together and not able to set the example that we ought to set.

In our first Scripture written by King Solomon you hear him tell his people to follow the example that he set for them and to follow his teachings. What was the example that he set for them? If you have been following along in the 88 day challenge you will have seen that Solomon could ask for anything, God says choose anything that you want and I will give it to you, and he asks for wisdom so that he can rule the people that God had given to him correctly. God is pleased with this decision, a decision based upon the needs of other people and a decision based upon improving the lot of others before seeking to improve your own lot. He says in vs.17 to the people that they should apply their mind to his teaching. Think upon what I have done, because you are what you think.

Paul gives similar advice in Philippians 4. Remember last week and the five point sermon that we looked at? Paul tells us to live our lives in the face of adversity and tension and tragedy so that, what are the five things: you are able to rejoice at all times, be gentle, do not worry, pray, and peace will flood your soul. Those were the five things. Remember when I said that you are taught that the people can't take more than three points, I gave five, today there are 8. No seriously, there are 8, we are going to fly through them.

Look at our two verses for today and you will find a list. It is a list that Paul takes directly from the Greek thought of the time. He doesn't take it from any Old Testament writing but rather compiles a best of in Greek thought and shares that with the church. He tells his people that if you look around you in the culture and the society you will find virtues that actually would be very beneficial to you as you live your life. You are what you think and you can think on these things by looking around you in the world. Do you hear that Strasburg? There are good things happening around us and if we were to open our eyes we would see them and many of them are not happening in churches.

We can use good examples within secular culture because people of Philippi, the Corinthians are an embarrassment, the Galatians leave me furious, and the Ephesians while sometimes getting it right, really aren't to be followed in the examples that they leave behind. I have never been more embarrassed to call myself an evangelical, and I do, than I am in these days that we are living. The causes and the actions that evangelical Christians, certainly those which seem to be in the majority, are taking up makes me want to disassociate myself from that

grouping. But I am evangelical because I believe Scripture is the Word of God and that the authority of Scripture cannot be trumped by the experiences that I have. God's word is more powerful and more authoritative than my word.

I am an evangelical because I believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation. There are not many ways to God, but one and only one and that is through Jesus Christ. I am an evangelical because I believe that our actions ought to reflect the words that Jesus spoke and the words of Scripture speak. If Scripture tells us to be gentle, we need to be gentle. But the evangelical church has become a bullhorn for that which is not of Christ, and I am embarrassed by it because I am an evangelical.

Let's quickly look at the 8 things that Paul tells us in vs.8 that we ought to think about, because we are, after all, what we think. Think about truth- that which has been communicated to you as truth from people that you trust and know. Not from what you read on social media. Think about that which is honorable – you can see in I Timothy 3:8 that deacons are describes as people of good character, that is where the term honorable comes from, good character. Think about that which is just – remember when Joseph determined to separate from Mary after he was told that she was pregnant, that was according to the law and he was called just. We could also call it righteous.

Think about that which is pure – in I Timothy 4:12 we read about how our actions ought to reflect a purity in speech, conduct, love, and faith. Think about what is pleasing – the Greek term there is *prophili*, *phili*, like Philadelphia reminds us to think about that which causes you to feel pleasure. Pleasure is a good thing, it is of God. Think about that which is commendable – this should be understood as fill your mind with what people should praise. Think about that which is excellent – this is moral excellence, outstanding goodness and virtue. Think about that which is worthy of praise – this is the description of an act that necessitates praise.

That's a lot to think about, but Paul tells us to think about these things, because you are what you think. He tells his beloved church that if they are wondering what that looks like then look at vs.9, keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. 10 years ago when I gave my candidating sermon here I said that if you look to me as an example of the Gospel you will be disappointed. I will fail you. My brothers can tell you stories. I would never set myself as an example for you to follow. I pray that my life is exemplary, but I would never pretend. I would much rather set the example of our Savior Jesus Christ as an example because he will never fail you.

But Paul says if you follow the example of Christ and think upon those things, then peace will result. Remember last week, that peace that passes all understanding, again that will result. Who doesn't want that result? Now, we have to be the ones who lead by example so that our children can think upon those things and follow our example. Our community who sees what we do and how we interact with the community during the pandemic is looking for a leader, let's lead by example. Amen.