

Shine

This weekend provided fans, enthusiasts, and casual observers the chance to watch the 151st running of the Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs, sometimes referred to as the “Most Exciting Two Minutes In Sports”. It is a beautiful spectacle with much buildup and pageantry. This year’s winner was a colt by the name of Sovereignty, who powered his way down the muddy track and overtook the race favorite on the final stretch, forever etching his name into the long-storied history of the Run for the Roses alongside names like Donerail, Affirmed, and American Pharaoh. Of course there is one name that *is* horse racing history: Secretariat. Secretariat is known for running the fastest 1¼ mile at Churchill Downs, being a triple crown winner, and having a giant heart, both literally and figuratively. Yet, every one of these spectacular horses was once a valuable, but unknown colt or filly. Left confined to a stable, neither the horse, nor the world would ever have recognized its true potential and purpose.

As followers of Jesus, we too are created for a magnificent purpose: to magnify God and make Him known. Often the Apostle Paul wrote of running, not in vain, but to win. In Philippians 2:12-13, he encouraged the believers at Philippi to take their faith out of stable and to obediently “work out their salvation” with awe and wonder of God. He then gives his readers an example of practical obedience that has far reaching impact:

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**, 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. (Phil 2:14-16)

How can doing “all things without grumbling and disputing” have such dramatic repercussions that practicing Christians stand in stark contrast to “a crooked and twisted generation”? Maybe it is because a life lived free of grumbling and disputing isn’t such a small thing after all! As a matter of fact, it is inseparable from our identity in Christ, since it prioritizes God’s glory and renown over our own and, therefore, requires contentment in all circumstances. Demonstrating trust and hope in the providence of God, magnifies God and proclaims His fame. A grumbling and disputing attitude, on the other hand, exposes fear and apathy in light of life’s hardships. This constant emotional unrest and questioning of God is incongruent with the children of God and dulls His glory in the eyes of the lost. It is in life's

inevitable pains, losses, and setbacks that Christians have the greatest opportunity to shine, because the world cannot make sense of this eternal perspective.

The band, Newsboys, took our US contemporary Christian music audience by storm in the early 1990s with their Australian accent, catchy tunes, and witty lyrics. In their breakthrough song “Shine”, the band described the confusion and curiosity a redeemed and radically changed life evokes in those who consider abandoning the things of this world for the sake of following Jesus as misguided and foolish (1 Cor 1:21). The song describes a lost world's bewilderment through the following humorous lyric: “Try as you may, there isn't a way to explain this kind of change that'll make an eskimo renounce fur, that'll make a vegetarian barbeque hamster... Shine. Let it shine before all men, let 'em see good works and then, let 'em glorify the Lord!”

Living out our faith - shining “like stars in the sky” (Phil 2:15, NIV) - is never conventional or comfortable. Yet, in the midst of the world's darkness and confusion there is to exist a church that shines forth like a beacon! That requires a familial winsomeness seen among spiritual brothers and sisters, who have become children of God through the loving adoption of the Father. The Apostle John reminds us of this wonderful relationship when he writes, “Behold what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 Jn 3:1). As God's children, the Father's spiritual character is to be exercised through the biblical “one anothers” and should function as a “welcome sign” to a world searching for true love and lasting satisfaction.

D.L. Moody vividly described this dynamic with the following quip: “A holy life will make the deepest impression. Lighthouses blow no horns; they just shine.” How true! Living a life of righteous contentment, free of murmuring and complaining, shines without the need of fanfare or much verbal posturing. It speaks for itself, as we take our gospel purpose out of the stable, onto the muddy track, and demonstrate our compassionate heart.

Matthew 5:14-16 (ESV) - “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.”