**Let the Lower Lights Be Burning**

**Introduction:**

November 10, 1975 was a dark, cold and stormy night on Lake Superior just off Cleveland. As sometimes is the case, 80 mile per hour winds and 30 foot waves sprung up without warning. The now iconic ship *S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald* sunk just short of reaching harbor. All 29 crew were lost without a trace with the cause of the wreck unknown until this day. She lies in 530 feet of water just 15 nautical miles from the safety of Whitefish Bay. In her day she was the largest ship ever to sail the Great Lakes. The maritime tragedy is memorialized by Gordon Lightfoot in his moving 1976 ballad, *The Wreck of the Edmond Fitzgerald*. Such losses of men and ships are nothing new off Whitefish Point. In fact, from 1816 until 1975 some 240 ships perished! One such loss in the middle of the 19th century moved song writer and missionary singer, Philip Bliss (1838 – 1876) to write a moving hymn: *Let the Lower Lights be Burning*. While in Chicago, Bliss heard a preacher tell of a similar tragedy that took place on Whitefish Bay off Cleveland more than 100 years before. The preacher told of a ship in a violent storm one stormy night trying to make Cleveland. As he drew near, (The captain) shouted to the lighthouse keeper, “Is this Cleveland?” The lighthouse keeper shouted back, “Quite true, sir!” The captain asked, “Where are the lower lights?” The lighthouse keeper said, “They have gone out. Can you make the harbor?” The captain replied, “We must, or we will perish!” With that he sailed his ship into the harbor, passed the lighthouse, missed the channel, and was dashed against the rocks. It was a terrible tragedy. Many people were killed. The preacher brought the story home with these words: “Brothers and sisters, the Master will take care of the lighthouse. Let US keep the lower lights burning!” Russ McCullough

The Words of this great hymn: **Let the Lower Lights be Burning**

Brightly beams our Father’s mercy From his lighthouse evermore, But to us he gives the keeping Of the lights along the shore.

CHORUS Let the lower lights be burning, Send a gleam across the wave! Some poor fainting struggling seaman, You may rescue, you may save.

Dark the night of sin has settled, Loud the angry billows roar; Eager eyes are watching, longing, For the lights along the shore.

Trim your feeble lamp, my brother; Some poor sailor tempest tossed, Trying now to make the harbor, In the darkness may be lost.

The possibility of a shipwreck in the dark of night is frightening. Before the invention of modern devices like radar and GPS, sailors had to rely on lighthouses to guide them through dangerous waters. While the lighthouse was the upper light, the “lower lights” were the lights in all the buildings around the harbor that helped light up the way so vessels could avoid the dangers and safely navigate the harbor. Throughout the Bible, light symbolizes safety and salvation. So it is the duty of God’s people to carry forth the light of the gospel to a world lost in darkness.

**Text:** Philippians 2:15

**Body:**

1. **Must Be Above Reproach**

* “Blameless” describes our outward character.
* “Innocent” describes our inward character. No legitimate claim of wrong doing can be laid at our feet. (Luke 1:6) (Job 1:8) Do not be a hypocrite!

1. **The World Is Filled with Darkness**

* “Darkness” refers to sin, evil.
* “Midst” means that we are in/among the world for a purpose.
* “Crooked” [skolios] means bent, twisted, deformed, and warped. The world is morally and spiritually corrupt. They do not walk the straight and upright path. (Luke 3:5, Proverbs 21:8, Proverbs 28:18)
* “Perverse” means distorted, depraved. (Acts 20:30)

1. **Shine As Lights**

* Christ is the light [lighthouse]. (John 1:1-5, 9)
* John was a lower light. (John 1:6-8)
* So Christians are fog lights that help prevent shipwrecks and loss. The darker the world gets, the brighter the light appears. (II Corinthians 4:3-4)
* As lower lights, we are to reflect the character and ways of our Savior. (Ephesians 5:8)
* Two things can dim our light.

1. Unconfessed sin (Psalm 51:10)
2. Fear of men

**Conclusion:**

Many of us will remember the childhood song: “This little light of mine. I’m gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine all the time.” We must let our lights shine in this world of darkness.

Bobby Stafford November 2, 2014