

KEEPING YOUR JOY - The Heartfelt Theology of an Isolated Prisoner - Part 7
Sunday, August 9th, 2020, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2043
Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

LIVING A LIFE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL

Philippians 1:27-30 - “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, [28] and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. [29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”

Paul may live and Paul may be executed. He thinks he may come to see them again, Lord willing (25-26). But he's not certain. And it's almost as though he lifts his warning finger in their faces as he says “***Only remember this....***”(27). Paul may come to them and he may not. Speculation about Paul's future or theirs *isn't* the point. There's only ***one*** point. And Paul uses that first word of **verse 27** to separate the important from the speculative - “***Only***” - “***This is the only thing you need to remember at this point!***”

The only thing they need to concentrate on is then made clear - “***Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ....***”(27a). Like Paul, they may live and they may die. But right now they live. And this is where they must shine the light of the gospel. And Paul is clear they must not only ***believe*** the gospel. They must manifest life-styles that are “***worthy of the gospel of Christ***”(27). The rest of today's text tells us ***how*** this is to be done and ***why*** it must be done.

- 1) **A LIFE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL IS MADE OBVIOUS ONLY BY ITS UNBENDING DETERMINATION TO STAND FOR THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL IN THE FACE OF ALL ELSE**

Philippians 1:27-28a - “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are ***standing firm in one spirit***, with one mind ***striving side by side for the faith of the gospel***, [28] and

not frightened in anything by your opponents....”

Here we see Paul’s genius at work. They write to Paul because they are concerned about how **he** is standing up. He has been going through a lot. He’s in prison. He tells them he is being slandered by other evangelists. He’s suffering greatly for his faith and proclamation of Christ Jesus. How long can he last? Is he going to make it? They want to know how Paul is **standing** up under it all.

Paul doesn’t tell them very much in his reply. He tells them how the **gospel** is doing. He tells them of the advance of his testimony to Christ.

And then there is this turning of the tables. He tells them they need to be concerned, not with how **he** is standing, but how **they** are going to stand for the faith of the gospel. In fact, Paul tells them this is the **only** thing they need to apply all their energy and attention to - **“Don’t worry about me. Make sure you stand!”**

This tells us all something about the **nature** of how we will grow in Christ. When you **start** your Christian life the only thing you need to do well is **wholeheartedly understand and accept the gospel**. There are not **ten** ways to be saved. There is only **one**. And you must **accept** the gospel. But in order to **continue** in the Christian life Paul says the **only** thing needed is to **stand firm** in the faith of the gospel. **Accepting** must grow into **standing firm**.

Again, this tells us something about the nature of how growth in Christ comes. Imagine you are going on a ride at a new amusement park. You’ve never been on this ride before and have no idea what to expect. You enter a large dark room with a rubber floor. The only thing you’re told is to make sure you **stand firm** throughout the entire ride. Whatever else you **don’t** know about the details of the ride, the one thing you’re sure of is **it is designed to shake you up**.

And when Paul tells these believers they don’t need to worry about him, but **must** devote all their energy to **standing firm**, he’s telling them about what growth in Christ is all about. The whole context of our text rings with clues. Look at the words Paul uses - **“standing firm”(27)**, **“striving side by side”(27)**, **“not frightened”(28)**, **“opponents”(28)**, **“suffer for his sake”(29)**, and **“engaged in the same conflict”(30)**. These terms all ring with the same theme of bracing for a tough ride.

Just this side note - O, the need to stop and consider the price that has already been paid for the confession of the faith you now so freely possess! Not only the purchase of death by God the Son, but the bold confession of so many who died to preserve New Testament Christianity.

Paul beheaded. Luther executed. William Tyndale burned at the stake. True, the gospel is **free**. But it surely didn't just fall into your lap out of the sky. This baton has been passed on to you. Are you really going to sell out because your friends don't warm to your devotion to Christ? Does it really matter that your professor mocks your beliefs? After all that has been invested, are you going to drop the ball just for that?

It would be easy for Christians, then and now, to assume **some** people would have to pay the price for their ministry for Jesus. People like **apostles** or **pastors** or **missionaries** are obviously **called** to sacrifice the lifestyles the rest of us are entitled to. Paul's point, of course, is to remind them **he's** not the only one engaged in conflict. **They** are no less likely than **he** to be called upon to suffer with and for Christ.

Trials come. Enemies of the cross always abound. There is always a **price** to pay to **stand firm** for Christ in this world. And no life can be "**worthy of the gospel**" where this isn't **considered** and even **cherished** every day. "**Make sure,**" says Paul, "**your whole life is worthy of the gospel of Christ.**"

2) **YOU CAN'T STAND FIRM IF YOU STAND ALONE**

Philippians 1:27 - "**Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel...."**

If Paul pleads for them to **stand firm** for the faith of the gospel he also tells them **how** this is to be done. What does a life "**standing firm**" look like? Well, it doesn't exist **apart** from the collective support of the church. A life won't "stand firm" **independently**. There is a "**side by side - ness**" to "standing firm" for the gospel of Christ. It simply can't be done alone.

I have been so startled to rediscover the way the Scriptures link all the important ingredients of life in Christ Jesus, not just to the ***Person of Christ***, but to our ***fellowship with the church***. I honestly didn't expect this to the degree it's revealed. Look at the familiar words of the apostle John with careful eyes:

1 John 1:1-3, 7 - "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- {2} and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- {3} what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ...{7} but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

Verses 1 through 3 deal with the proclamation of the "***Word of Life***"(1). Verse 3 specifically claims the ***reason*** for proclaiming Christ is the creation of "***fellowship***" in the church - "***....that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us....***"

Then, as if to make it all even clearer, verse 7 joins together "***fellowship with one another***" and the "***blood of Jesus***" cleansing us from all sin - "***But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.***"

Somehow this has become almost foreign to our evangelical thinking. We've neatly separated ***fellowship with the church*** from the ***cleansing of our sins by the blood of Jesus***. Yet John clearly says this is impossible. The life of Jesus received by faith does ***two things*** not ***one***. It ***incorporates*** and then ***forgives*** - **1 John 1:7** - "***....we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.***" It never does one independently of the other. And note the order of those two things in this verse.

This is why, everywhere in the New Testament, when anyone is ***excluded*** in a disciplinary fashion from fellowship with the church, they're also excluded from the forgiving grace of Jesus

Christ. Read it for yourself:

1 Corinthians 5:5 - “.... you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”

1 Timothy 1:20 - “....among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

Both these passages deal with individuals being ***excluded from the fellowship of the church***. This, in Paul’s mind, is the same as ***turning these people over to Satan***. This is not some superstitious curse Paul pronounced in some fit of anger while chanting around a fire. This is an accurate picture of what happens to people ***separated from the fellowship of the church***. They are vulnerable. They are somehow separated from the protective grace of Jesus as they are separated from the church.

Paul’s point in our text is the opposite side of the same coin. People can ***stand*** and they can ***strive*** and they can ***live lives worthy of the gospel***. Yes they can. Even weak and faltering people - people like we - can. But only as we fellowship deeply and consistently together.

We don’t just pray. We pray ***together***. We don’t just study. We study ***together***. We don’t just serve. We serve ***together***. We don’t just worship. We worship ***together***. ***Only in the togetherness do we stand***. The corporate pool of the church is the ***deep end*** of God’s redeeming, keeping grace.

Now we come to the heart and soul of our text:

3) **THE TIME GOD’S GRACE IS DISPLAYED MOST RICHLY IN OUR LIVES AND WHY THIS MATTERS SO MUCH**

Philippians 1:28-30 - “....and ***not frightened in anything by your opponents***. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. [29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should ***not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake***, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now

hear that I still have.”

If you crave for Christ to be exalted more deeply in your life pray over these words. They extend a deeper brand of faith than is being hustled in our user-friendly marketed church. Here Paul describes God's life in Christ being pressed into the deepest levels of our knowing.

If, as Paul said of himself, Christ is equally exalted by either Paul's life or death (**1:20-21**), and if, as **verse 29** states, suffering for Christ is a badge of honor - a **gift** that builds the sufferer and glorifies Christ more than any miracle - then victory for the cause of Christ must be something deeper than the undoing of my trial or the divine reversal of my trying circumstances. There must be another **kind** of triumph for the cause and glory of Christ in Paul's mind.

If you read this whole text carefully - right from **verse 27 to 30** - you will find Paul never promises these Christians they will experience deliverance from their opponents or their suffering. What they are promised isn't **deliverance** but **testimony**.

He promises their faithful **standing** for the gospel will give a **sign of truth** among both friends and enemies of Christ - “...and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. [29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake....”

People will see clearly **what is worth treasuring - what is worth living for - and what is worth dying for**. This will pronounce **judgment** on those who turned from Christ to nonsense and trivia. And it will give **courage** to those who need deeper strength in standing up in their own trial for Christ. Either way, the **truth** about the **magnificence** of Christ is demonstrated.

This is Paul's whole point. **Our lives only count to the degree they prove Christ is worth living and dying for**. You can't just **tell** people Christ is worth living and dying for. They can't get their heads around that. We must **show** them Christ is all in all. Paul says the very same thing in different words in another strong text:

2 Corinthians 2:15-16 - “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are

being saved and among those who are perishing, [16] to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life....”

Our greatest victory, contrary to thousands of false voices, isn't in our **deliverance** (though that may sometimes be granted). It is in our **witness**. If we are supernaturally delivered from our trials enemies of Christ will see only the **power** of our Lord. But if we are enabled to courageously be mocked and shunned for following Christ people will see the **desirability** of Christ over everything else. This is how they will be drawn and won. Or this is how the world will be judged for rejecting the **evidence** of our faithful witness to the beauty and grace of Jesus.

Paul doesn't promise the Philippian Christians **their** deliverance any more than he can promise them **his**. That's **not** what this passages is about. Our calling is to be **“clear signs”** to everything that is true and precious about Christ in life and death - **Philippians 1:28** - **“...and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”**

The calling is to be a **“sign”** to all who will see that we treasure Christ more than ourselves. This is the **calling** of Christ. It is the greatest **gift** He gives to us and the world around us. It is enough for us that He is glorified. It is enough that we point to Him as prized about all else. Such witnesses display the truth of His beauty as long as they live. And a human life can't be better spent than that.