

MONDAY, 8/19

Read Philippians 1:27a.

When you read Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, you might notice that it feels different than Paul's other letters. The reason for that is it is a letter of friendship. While Paul had spent only three months ministering in Philippi, he developed a close bond with the church, and they quickly became partners with him in ministry.

We see evidence of this through a gift that Paul is given by the church. It appears that Paul was given some money and resources, which was significant because Paul was in prison. He wasn't in a position to take care of his needs, and prisoners depended on loved ones for their provision.

In their culture, as in ours, a gift bound you to the giver. It often provoked the recipient to respond in kind with a gift of their own. Paul argues here that Jesus has given us a gift, the gift of salvation, and he asks us the question, *what will you give back to Him?*

The only fitting answer is ourselves. Just as He gave all of Himself that we might have new life, so we offer Him our lives. Now, you might wonder what that looks like. Jesus went to the cross, and while He calls us to take up our own crosses, the day-to-day expression of our allegiance to Jesus is to embody the Good News.

That is what Paul states here in the first half of verse 27. He says, "This one thing, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." The NIV reads, "Whatever happens", but that isn't very accurate, in my humble opinion. "This one thing" better captures Paul's intention; in fact, it is the central argument of the entire letter. He is saying, "If there is one thing we are to be about as followers of Jesus it is this: to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

He is not saying that we have to live worthy lives in order to earn life from Jesus. He is saying the appropriate response in light of Jesus' gift to us is to give ourselves. It is for our lives to be shaped so that we reflect His vision of the Kingdom of God. Jesus wants His teachings and the ministry of the Spirit to mold and transform us to where we see, think, and act more like Jesus. Jesus' church must be conformed to Christ, which is the Head of the Body.

This is the one thing on which Paul wants you, as a recipient of new life through Jesus, to fix your attention. We are citizens of God's Kingdom by the grace given to us. With God's help, we can learn to live as people of God's newly redeemed creation.

Praying Together:

"Lord, You have given me everything. You poured out Your life for me. You invited me into God's Kingdom. Teach me and empower me to live in a way that reflects You. Amen."

TUESDAY, 8/20

Read Philippians 2:19-30.

Hopping over to chapter two for the day, we read about two people who are living lives worthy of the gospel of Christ. It's important that we read about them because this helps to answer the question of what it looks like for us to live in such a way.

The first person Paul holds up as an example of one living like a citizen of God's Kingdom is Timothy. We see Timothy throughout Paul's story. He was a co-worker with Paul. Paul notes that Timothy looked out for the interests of others with genuine concern. It is far more common to see people seeking their own interests, but Timothy reflects Jesus in that he makes the concerns of others more important.

This is consistent also with Philippians 2:3-4, which reads, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." This may not be the easiest thing to do, but imagine with me what it would be like to be a part of a community that lived like this. Imagine people valuing everyone else above themselves. That is a community that will honor and bring glory to Jesus.

Paul also lifts up Epaphroditus as an example of one living in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. You can tell from Paul's description that he is quite close to Epaphroditus. The two of them fought on the frontlines, so to speak, of advancing the Good News of Jesus. Epaphroditus laid his life on the line for Jesus and for Paul, even falling gravely ill. He recovered, but not before showing his commitment to the Kingdom.

Thinking of Epaphroditus' example, I wonder in what ways are we making sacrifices for God's Kingdom. How are we invested in Jesus' work?

May we learn from the example of Timothy and Epaphroditus that we too may live lives worthy of the Good News we have received in Jesus.

Praying Together:

"God, we celebrate the faithful witnesses of people who love You and are committed to You. We want to be such witnesses so that others look at us and see Your greatness through us. Continue to pour out Your grace upon us so that we look more like You. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 8/21

Read Philippians 1:27b.

We are looking at the second half of verse 27 today. After Paul challenges the church to live as citizens of God's Kingdom, reflecting His heart and values, he tells them why he wants them to do so. It is so that Paul will have the assurance that they will "stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel."

Why is it so important to Paul that he sees the church working together to share and embody the gospel? The reason is that this is what the church is called to do. This is the work that Jesus started and then passed on to us. If we are to fulfill the mission Jesus entrusted to us, we must be unified in our mind and efforts.

One thing to note here in this verse is whether your translation says in one “spirit” or “Spirit”. The first has to do with our attitude, while the second refers to the Holy Spirit. Translators had to choose, and it seems to be evenly split. Personally, I believe Paul is speaking of spirit as in their attitude. The reason I believe this is that Paul spends much of the letter emphasizing unity through a shared spirit. Of course, you can argue that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to help the church live out a shared spirit, and you would be right.

The church's spirit is their common identity, one that was based on the Lord. It was an identity forged, not in shared bloodlines like family, but in the blood of Christ shed for them. Paul urges the church to stand firm together in who they are in the Lord.

Elsewhere in Philippians, Paul calls this community to have one mind. In Philippians 2, Paul will expand on his understanding of what it means to have one mind, or what he calls the same mind. Again, this shared mind comes from Christ. It is a reflection of His mind and values. This underscores the belief that the life of the Christian is a life that is being conformed to Christ in every way. I feel a bit like a broken record here, but we cannot miss it. The aim of the Christian life is to know Christ in such a way that we begin to see the world as He sees, think about the world as He does, and love like He loves.

It is vital to our ministry as a church that we are all fixed on this one goal and that we are moving together in making Jesus known by having the same identity in Him and same mind as He did.

Praying Together:

“Jesus, we need You and the work of the Holy Spirit to make us a restored community with one heart, one mind, and one goal, which is to bring You glory. Help us to share Your story with passion and authenticity. We want the gospel to touch other lives as it has touched our own. Amen.”

THURSDAY, 8/22

Read Philippians 1:28a.

Looking at the first half of verse 28, we see Paul finish the sentence he started in verse 27. After calling the church to stand firm in a shared spirit in Christ and to strive together to share the Good News about Christ, he says to do so “without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.”

Now, Paul has embedded a message for the church here, and it is that you will meet opposition. As the church grows and the gospel message changes lives, it will meet opposition. It was already happening in churches all around them. As Jesus' followers

shifted their allegiance from Caesar to Jesus, they had to expect people to turn against them. The question for Paul wasn't if the church would face opposition; it was when.

This meant that the church had to be ready. It would be foolish to not prepare for a coming storm. Now was the time to get their minds and their hearts right. It was time to form a vision of how they were to live while being opposed.

The same could be said for the church today. The world is not always friendly to the church. There is a growing animosity toward the church in our own culture. This should not surprise us. The world has never been friendly to the church. If the church finds itself being fast friends with the world, chances are it isn't being the church.

That isn't to say that we seek to be a bur in the world's saddle. We do, however, stand firm in what we believe. We do this out of a spirit of conviction built on a foundation of Christ's love. Our aim isn't to make enemies of those in the world, but to win them to Christ. We need to remember that our enemies aren't flesh and blood, but the evil one and his minions that seek to destroy.

Given that we have the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords on our side, we do not have to fear even when the opposition turns fierce. We know the outcome of the story: Jesus wins and everyone with Him. We do not have to fear what the world may seek to take away from us. It is God's Kingdom that prevails. This world will pass away.

We must occupy the same spirit of Christ when He faced opposition. When he hung on the cross, after having faced the lashes and insults of the soldiers, Jesus prayed for them, saying, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." He did not fear them. He stood firm and never let His witness be dragged down by their opposition. May we strive to follow His example even as we face hardships.

Praying Together:

"Son of God, we are humbled by Your spirit as You faced trouble in this world. If anyone had reason to lash out in retaliation, it was You. You, however, chose to stand firm and exhibit grace. Even some of those who considered themselves to be Your enemies saw who You were through Your righteous actions. Help us to be such a church that we may stand firm both in our convictions and commitment to love as You do. Amen."

FRIDAY, 8/23

Read Philippians 1:28b.

The second half of verse 28 takes an interesting turn. Paul says, "This (the church standing firm together in the face of opposition) is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God." Let's take a deeper look at this.

One of the rules of the world is "Hit me and I'll hit you back". Most of us learned this in fourth grade on the playground. Retaliation typically initiates and perpetuates a cycle of ungrace, an unbroken chain of harm. When we engage in such actions, we are not

reflecting God's Kingdom. Violence is not a part of God's reign. It is a sign of an order that will be judged and condemned. We would do well to understand this so that we don't participate in it. Those who do show themselves to be a part of an order that is passing away, an order that is not of God's vision for His Kingdom.

However, when we stand firm in such opposition as Jesus did, we show that we are a part of God's order. We show ourselves to be citizens of God's Kingdom. We no longer care about the rules of the world because we are under God's gracious rule. We play by His rules and are governed by His Spirit. This produces righteous actions that are evidence of His claim upon us. We show, in this way, that we belong to God's order, which isn't passing away, but will be fulfilled.

How we live through opposition goes right back to Paul's call to fix our eyes on the "one thing," which is to "conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ". Jesus, by His mercy and grace, has saved us. For the well-being of the church and its witness, our lives must reflect our new identity in Him.

Praying Together:

"Holy Spirit, we feel the challenge of these words regarding our witness amidst opposition. Help us live, not by the rules of the world, but by the vision of God's Kingdom. We are under Jesus' rule, and we long to bring Him glory by living as He did. We cannot do this without Your help. Amen."

SATURDAY, 8/24

Read Philippians 1:29.

Yikes. Suffering? Are You sure, God? I'm willing to bet when you heard the pastor offer Jesus to you, they did not mention that it involves suffering. That isn't a good marketing strategy. It is, however, the reality of the Christian life.

While we would rather focus on the blessings that accompany our life in Christ (and there are countless blessings indeed) we must be aware that such a life will also carry inherent risks. Let's consider a few of them.

New life in Jesus begins when we "deny ourselves." This means we surrender ourselves, our will, our wants, our very lives to Jesus. That is risky! It certainly feels that way at times. Of course, when we encounter the goodness and glory of Jesus, we realize we can trust Him. Even still, our new life in Christ confronts our old vision for our lives directed by our own will.

We also know that living for God's Kingdom comes at a cost at times. It might cost your relationships if people turn on you and the decisions you make. It might hurt your career. When Jesus spoke of suffering to His disciples, He often said it looked like rejection--your community, friends and even family turning against you.

For Jesus and the church, suffering often took a physical turn. The powers that be made life hard of them. They put economic and physical strain upon them in an effort

to break their spirit. They were beaten, pushed away, and even killed. I can tell I'm really selling you on the Christian life.

This brings up the question, *why follow Jesus if it leads to potential suffering? Why suffer for Him?* We follow Jesus because He is Lord, not because it is easy. If your goal is an easy life, then don't follow Jesus. We follow Him because He is worthy. We are willing to face hardship and even suffer for Him because He suffered for us. God's very own Son, the Lord of all creation, chose to suffer for you and me. That is why we are willing to suffer for Him. Paul counted it a privilege to suffer for the Jesus who had suffered for him. While we may not share his enthusiasm for suffering, we are ready to serve Him and bring Him glory no matter the cost.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, You are worthy. You left the glory of the heavens to come to us and to suffer for us. You didn't have to do so, but You counted it joy. Therefore, we will do whatever You ask. We will embrace hardship and suffering for You as You did for us. May You be honored through it. Amen."

SUNDAY, 8/25

Read Philippians 1:30.

Imagine that you are a part of the Philippian church. You are reading through Paul's letter. The church is relatively new. You have believed in Jesus for only for a year or so, and you're still so excited about what is ahead--but now Paul talks about suffering.

The subject catches you off guard. You've heard of other churches and Christians facing persecution, but it hasn't come to your doorstep yet. Sure, you've seen signs of opposition in the community, but it hasn't gotten out of hand. As Paul calls his own story to mind--of the hardship to which he was subjected--it begins to hit you: that same suffering is coming to you.

How would you feel? What would run through your mind?

It's important for us to consider. Suffering for Christ is a common theme in the New Testament. We see Jesus' disciples and the early church face opposition as they sought to advance God's Kingdom. I know suffering for Jesus feels far from us. In some ways it is. In other ways, it's much closer than you think.

Are you willing to endure hardships for your faith in Jesus? Are you willing to hold to your convictions even if it costs you?

I can't tell you when you will face a hardship because of your love for Jesus. I can't tell you what it will look like. I can tell you to expect it. I can encourage you to be ready. I will encourage you to grow in the character of Christ so that you can rise up and meet it as He did with the spirit He had. May it be so with each of us.

Praying Together:

“Father, thank You for loving us. Thank You for sending Your precious Son to us that we might live through Him. Be our help when trouble comes. Grow us in our love and character that we might meet any challenge as Jesus would. Amen.”