

## Philippians 1:27-30

### Introduction

It's been said that the gospel is the free gift that costs you everything. God gives us life and salvation as a gift. It has been paid for in full through Christ's death on the cross. We receive it through faith alone not by works. We contribute nothing. But nonetheless, it comes at a price. One writer says this:

Every true believer must be willing to endure reproach, ridicule, and rejection... They must be willing to relinquish their earthly popularity, pleasures, and possessions. A disciple must be willing to receive slander, shame, and suffering for the gospel. This is the high cost of discipleship. (Steven J. Lawson)

And this is the theme of the next few verses in Paul's letter to the Philippians. It's a letter that's full of the joy of the Christian life. Yet it's also realistic about what the Christian life entails. And Paul begins by exhorting the Philippians to live worthy of their calling. That's our first heading: Live worthy of the gospel.

### Live worthy of the gospel

Look at verse 27 with me: **Whatever happens**, Paul writes, **conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ**.

Paul is on trial for his life. He doesn't know whether the outcome will be life or death. But whatever happens, he has just one instruction for the Christians in Philippi: **...conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ**. More literally, in the original language, what Paul writes is this: Live out your citizenship in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Philippi had the highly coveted honour of being a Roman colony. That meant that the people of Philippi were regarded as citizens of Rome itself, with the status and privileges that came with it. It was a status they took great pride in. But it brought certain responsibilities. The people of Philippi were to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of Rome. They were to show allegiance to Rome and abide by its laws. Their citizenship of Rome was to shape their conduct in every area of life. And they were to live in a way that displayed something of the glory of Rome. But Paul uses the language of citizenship to remind the Christians in Philippi that they have a dual citizenship. They may be regarded as citizens of Rome. But they now had an even greater citizenship.

Through faith in the gospel of Christ, they had been made citizens of the kingdom of God. From now on, they were to think of themselves not as an outpost of Rome but as an outpost of heaven. Their highest allegiance was no longer to Caesar but to Jesus. And they were to conduct themselves accordingly, in a way that displayed the glory of the gospel.

*That* would inevitably put them on a collision course with those in the society around them. And we are on a similar collision course as followers of Jesus today. Gathered here this morning, we represent a collection of many different nationalities. Most of us here will have British citizenship. Some of us may be in the process of applying for British citizenship. And we may feel that it's something to be proud of. We may feel proud to be British just as others feel proud of their own national identities. But Paul's reminding us that, whichever country we come from, as Christians we all share a greater citizenship. And to live as those whose first allegiance is to Jesus is to be on a collision course with the society around us.

To be a follower of Jesus is increasingly to swim against the tide of the society we live in. If you've ever watched *The Chosen* on TV, you'll know that the show's logo is a small number of teal-coloured fish swimming in the opposite direction to the grey fish around them. The show's all about the Jesus and his disciples. And the point of the logo is that following Jesus is means swimming against the tide. That's exactly right. We're experiencing that right now here in Britain.

To believe that there is one true God, a future judgement at which all people will be held to account, and only one way of salvation through faith in Jesus, is to be at odds with the beliefs of vast swathes of the society we live in. To live for the world to come rather than the pleasures and possessions of this world is to be at odds with the rampant materialism of the society we live in. To love our enemies, respect those we disagree with, and show goodwill to all people, no matter who they are, is increasingly at odds with the prevailing attitudes held by many in the society we live in. To hold biblical convictions about sexual morality, marriage, the sanctity of life, and a whole host of other things... it all puts us at odds with the society we live in. If you've ever had the experience of trying to walk through a crowd of people who are travelling in the opposite direction, with all the jostling and bumping that entails, being a Christian often feels like that. To live as a Christian often feels like fighting against the crowd.

And it's in *that* context that Paul says: **Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.** That must be our priority. And Paul goes on to tell us what it involves. It means standing firm together, he says. That's our second heading: Stand firm on the gospel.

### Stand firm on the gospel

Please look down again at verse 27. **Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.**

To stand firm is to be unmoving. Paul's using a picture of soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder on the battlefield, holding their ground. It's the kind of scene that was shown in

the film *Gladiator*. If you saw it, you might remember the hero, Maximus, standing in the great Coliseum, with a handful of other men. They're a bunch of slaves who had become gladiators. And they're being made to re-enact a famous victory of the Roman Legion at the Battle of Carthage. This little band of gladiators represent the enemy. They're waiting for the Roman forces to enter the arena through a big set of gates. And they're about to be slaughtered for the entertainment of the crowd.

Then the camera switches to Maximus, played by Russell Crowe, who immediately takes charge of this band of unfortunate men. He asks if any of them have been in the army. Some say yes. 'You can help me,' he says. 'Whatever comes out of these gates, we have a better chance of survival if we work together. Do you understand? We stay together, we survive.'

At that moment the gates to the arena open and in roll the chariots of the Roman Legion. At first the gladiators ignore the words of Maximus and scatter. One by one they get picked off. Then Maximus shouts to them, 'Come together', which they begin to do. Again, he shouts, 'Lock your shields, stay as one.' With a bit more urgency they come together, side by side, shields locked. And now, at last, they begin to defend themselves. And, of course, since this is Hollywood, the unexpected happens. This little group of gladiators, working together under the leadership of Maximus, don't simply defend themselves. They start fighting back. They defeat the Roman soldiers and re-write the history books.

That's what Paul has in mind. He's urging the Philippians to stand firm together - not against Roman soldiers but against the opponents of the gospel in Philippi. They're to stand firm on the gospel. It's what we're to do here in Hastings. We're to stand firm on the gospel and resist being swept along by the beliefs and attitudes of the society around us. And we can only do it together. When you and I try to go it alone in the Christian life, without the fellowship and encouragement of others, then we're putting ourselves in danger of being picked off one by one by the lure of the world and the schemes of the devil. If we're to stand firm, we must do it together. We need each other. And standing firm isn't passive. It's active. It involves, Paul says: **striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.**

We strive for the faith of the gospel by throwing ourselves into living for Christ wherever we are: at home, at work, or out with our friends. To strive is to do that with all our strength, exalting Christ through our words and actions. And we strive together as *one* by doing that together. Of course, we can't all go everywhere together. We can't all go to the office together or the rugby club or the singing group. And, frankly, it would be a bit odd if we did. Can you imagine what people would think if we all turned up at work with Michael tomorrow morning! But whatever each of us is doing tomorrow morning, we can do it knowing that we've got the support and prayers of our church family behind us. In that sense, we don't go anywhere alone.

As we gather on a Sunday morning, we remind each other that we belong to something bigger than ourselves. As we open God's word and sing and pray together, we help each other to fix our eyes on Jesus and on God's eternal purpose for us. In our home groups we wrestle with God's word together, talking about what it means for our lives and sharing ways we can pray for each other during the week. As we meet up one to one and talk on the phone, we can remind each other of God's promises and encourage each other. That's why it's so important that we make the most of opportunities to spend time together, and why we're worse off when we don't. We need each other. We can only go out into the world and live for Christ, if we do it together, **[standing] firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose [us].** And as we do, Paul says: **This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved - and that by God.**

In other words, it's a sign to those who oppose us that they are travelling in the wrong direction, and that they need to repent and turn around. Our willingness to stand firm together in the face of opposition sends a very powerful message. That's why, finally, Paul urges us to be willing even to suffer together for the sake of the gospel. That's our final heading: Suffer together for the gospel.

### Suffer together for the gospel

Paul goes on, in verse 29: **For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.**

Paul speaks here of two privileges that God grants to his people. The first is the gift of faith: **it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ,** Paul says... **to believe in him.** If anyone is to believe in Christ, then it must be granted to them by God. Faith is a gift that comes from God. But this first gift comes with a second gift: **For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him...**

These two are a package deal. When we're given the gift of faith, we're also given the privilege of suffering for our faith. That may not sound like much of a gift. But it's the shape of the gospel. Suffering now, glory later.

You may have heard of Paul Miller, who wrote *A Praying Life*. He describes the shape of the Christian life as the J-Curve. It's the path that Jesus walked. Through his incarnation, he suffered mockery, rejection and death on a cross for our salvation. But then was he raised to glory, through his resurrection and exaltation. The path he followed was the shape of a letter J, first down but then up. And it's the same path that he calls us to tread. He warned his disciples that if people hated him then they would hate them too. And that's how it happened. When Paul had brought the gospel to Philippi he had been arrested, mobbed and beaten. He was imprisoned and put into stocks. The Philippians had seen it with their

own eyes. And now they were going through the same struggle that they had seen Paul go through. They were experiencing the same opposition and hostility.

And for us, living here in Hastings, it's no different. There will always be a price to pay for those who follow Jesus. Thankfully, for us, it's unlikely to mean facing physical harm. But it might mean losing friends. It might mean enduring mockery and insults. It might mean feeling increasingly marginalised and unwelcome in our own country. We should expect that. And when we experience it, Paul says, rather than seeing it as a sign that something's wrong, we should see it as a sign that we're on the right path. It's a sign that we're walking the same path as Jesus, and Paul, and the Philippians, and countless other believers who have gone before us; the path that leads down through suffering but then up to glory in heaven.

### Conclusion

So, this is how to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. It's to stand firm, striving together for the faith of the gospel. And, if necessary, it's to suffer together for the sake of Christ, just as others have done before us.

If you wouldn't yet call yourself a Christian, the things I've spoken about this morning may not sound all that attractive; things like going against the crowd, standing firm in the face of opposition, being willing to suffer for Christ. The Bible doesn't hide the cost of following Jesus. It's real. And it's a high cost. Becoming a Christian may cost you everything. But it's worth it. It's worth it because the message of Jesus is a message of salvation and life. The path Jesus leads us on is full of joy and blessing, despite the opposition and suffering we might meet along the way, because we know where we're heading. And it's a path we walk with him and with others. The invitation of Jesus is to come to him and experience his love among his people, both now and forever. The path he leads us on may be a path of suffering. But it's a path that's full of joy, both now and, even more so, in eternity.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, please help us, as a family of believers here at Emmanuel, not to be fearful of going against the crowd as we live for Jesus. Please help us to live for Jesus with all the energy you give us, in every sphere of life, even if that means suffering mockery and opposition as we do. Please help us to stand firm together, striving together, for the faith of the gospel, supporting and encouraging each other, and keeping our eyes fixed on our heavenly destination. And we ask it in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.