

Worthy of the Gospel

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the assistant pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today.

A special welcome if you are visiting or new with us. As I like to say, we're glad you're here, and we're glad you're here not because you're filling a seat, but because we are following Jesus, and we're convinced that there is no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it.

And so God is going to have something to say to everyone in his word, and everyone needs to hear what God has to say. If you've been with us over the last month or so, you know that we are in the book of Philippians, and Philippians is a letter.

It's a letter that's written to a church, and that church is very similar to our church. And that church is in a city, the city of Philippi, that's very similar to our city. Remember, Philippi is one of the only Roman colonies in Macedonia, and so the citizens there are a higher percentage military than you would expect in other cities.

Some of them because they were already citizens because of their military service, and so they wanted to move to a Roman colony where the tax benefits would be greater. Some of them were already there because they came from military families, and Philippi has a great military heritage.

[1 : 2 0] And so this is a city that takes pride in its Roman citizenship. And that's going to become important this morning because the first thing that Paul is going to tell us in verse 27 is, only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

And it's an unfortunate translation because literally what Paul is saying in the Greek is, act like a citizen of the gospel. And so he's writing to people who are proud of their earthly citizenship, their Roman citizenship, living in a city where they would have felt pressure to act as a Roman citizen, to adopt the values of Roman culture and Roman society.

And he tells them instead to adopt the values of the gospel. And so these are believers, members of the church who feel under pressure. Much like us, they live in a culture that values greed, and yet they're called to generosity.

They live in a culture of sexual anarchy, and yet they're called to sexual integrity. They live in a culture that doesn't care for the poor, and yet they're called to do that.

And even more than that, we're going to find out that they have opponents in verse 28, that there are people who are actually pressing in on them. And so as I've mentioned before, this is a book about partnership in the gospel, and the question that we're going to see today is, how do we have our partnership in the gospel when opposition comes?

[2 : 5 5] When we feel the pull of dual citizenship? When the culture that we find ourselves in asks very different things of us than the culture that God has, the demands that God makes on us.

That's the tension that the believers in the city of Philippi face. It's the tension that we face as well, and it's what Paul is going to speak to in this passage. So we're in Philippians. We're still in chapter 1.

We're starting at verse 27. Remember that this is God's word, and God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

And it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. So turn with me now to verse 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, 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. Verse 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, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

[4 : 28] Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you know, as the psalmist tells us, that we are just dust.

You know that we're frail. And yet as we're frail, we still face challenges and opposition in this word, and so we thank you that you've spoken to us. You haven't left us alone as orphans, but you talk to us.

You tell us things, and you do it in ways and words that we can hear and that we can understand. And so we ask now that you would pour out your spirit to speak to us.

You'd pour out your spirit on me as I explain your word on everyone as we hear that you would allow us to understand and to believe and to obey.

We ask all these things in the name of your son. Amen. So our question here is, how do we respond to opposition?

[5 : 31] How do we respond to opposition, and what is God doing in the midst of it? How does God work in our lives when we face opposition? Paul doesn't waste any time. He cuts right to the point in verses 27 and 28.

He wants them to live as these citizens of the gospel, and he tells us exactly what that means. It means that they would be striving together, striving one mind side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

And the point Paul is making is simply this, and this is a dynamic that you'll see if you've been in church for a while, if you've studied church history, there are two options for any church. And they're this.

We are either going out in a mission with each other, or we are going on a mission against each other. We are either going out in mission with each other, or we are going on a mission against each other.

Paul's writing to a church here that's struggling with unity. They're struggling to get along. And he's telling them, as you feel pressure from the outside, there's only one way you're going to survive.

[6 : 41] And that's by working with each other rather than against each other. And so this goes back to what we saw in the very introduction to the letter where he told them that they needed to discern what was right and most excellent.

That they would know what are the important things to focus on. What are the gospel issues that they can focus on? Remember that with partnership in the gospel, the gospel is the focus of Jesus' death and his resurrection.

And so the church needs to know how to keep the primary things primary and the secondary things secondary. And so the first truth is that we have one of these two options. We're either working with each other or against each other.

The other reality is that when there's opposition, the church has to choose between those two things. In other words, there is no option for the church except to join together in unity or to not make it, to not survive against their opponents.

And this is something that we can use. It's a spiritual diagnostic tool. I was gone the last several weeks and while I was gone, I was in the mountains at one point and my low tire pressure light came on. And it's a very frightening light.

[7 : 47] It's this exclamation point with parentheses around it, which in my mind should mean something like your engine is about to fail. So the first time this light went on for me, this was not the first time, thankfully, but the first time I panicked a little bit.

I do what I always do when I have car problems that I don't understand. I quickly call my dad. Ask him, what is going on? There's an exclamation point on my dashboard.

Like, should I pull over right now and take it to the mechanic? Find out it's only low tire pressure. So this is probably the one flaw in all Subaru makers that they've decided to make the low tire pressure light this very frightening warning.

But there's a spiritual diagnostic here that if we're not working together, then it's clear that we've not been able to discern what's best and what's right.

Because if we discern what is right, if we understand what's important, if we're working together for the gospel, then we'll be able to work with each other rather than against each other. Now again, don't hear what I'm not saying.

[8 : 50] Remember, Paul later is going to refer to certain people in the church as mutilators of the flesh and dogs. So Paul doesn't have a problem fighting over things. There are things that are worth disagreeing about, but Paul knows when to decide what's worth fighting over and what's not.

And this is a dynamic that it's not just something that you see if you're in the church, but the outside world notices this dynamic as well. A couple of years ago, there was an article in November of 2016, there was an article in The Economist, which is not an American publication.

It's not written by Christians or for Christians. It's a European magazine. And they wrote an article about the relationship of churches in Europe. And they had noticed that as the heat had been rising on the church in Europe, the same exact dynamic had taken place.

That there was greater unity than there had ever been before between people who disagreed about various things. And so as it goes on, the article says this, asks this question. Why then the emphasis on commonality?

They've been describing the reality that these churches are pulling together like they've never pulled together before. There are some obvious reasons. At a time when Christianity feels under pressure from secularism in the Christian West and from persecution in the Middle East, there is a natural impulse among its practitioners to close ranks and play town sectarian difference.

[10 : 16] Again, that's the non-Christian's explanation. In July, when an elderly Catholic priest was murdered at the altar in France, very few Christians of any sect reacted by saying, never mind, he wasn't one of ours, or even serves him right for being a heretic.

In Germany, the Lutheran Catholic churches face almost identical dilemmas. Both are struggling to hold their ground as members leave, either through disenchantment with religion or to avoid paying church taxes.

Both are wondering what to do as Islam gains adherence and demands the same status. As Germany's Christian churches have long enjoyed, it would not make sense for Lutherans and Catholics to be squabbling with one another.

And so again, the church is either going out in a mission with each other or going on a mission against each other. In practical terms, it looks like this.

we can either argue about our preferences in music or we can figure out how to reach out to Otero Elementary School. But we simply don't have time to do both.

[11 : 21] We can argue about the right way to teach our children or we can strive together side by side to raise them with sexual integrity. That it's simply at times just a matter of time.

We don't have time to do both. And so we have to figure out what's most important. And so what I'm not saying is that differences don't matter. But we have to determine our focus.

And our focus is something that draws us together, joins us, that we're striving side by side. In fact, in the face of opposition, we have no other choice but to realize what is most important and work together for it.

It's not the only thing he tells them, though. In verse 28, he says, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. So not just striving side by side for the sake of the gospel but doing so without fear.

And why is it that they can go out and not have fear? Well, it's because of their dual citizenship. They're citizens of Rome but they're also citizens of the gospel. And so I'll ask you a simple question.

[12 : 27] Which still exists right now? The Roman Empire or the church? It's the church, right?

And so that's why they don't have to be frightened in anything. Because it's their heavenly citizenship that is more real and more powerful than their citizenship on earth.

And so they can strive side by side together being of one mind as we'll find out in chapter 2. Striving side by side, having one spirit.

In other words, they've all partaken in the Holy Spirit. They've received the truth and reality of the gospel and that's what allows them to have unity. It's the gospel that brings them together because the religious person, the legalist, says, be good like I am good.

And you can't have unity if someone's saying be good like I'm good because you're just going to have pride. People are going to be calling each other to be like themselves. The non-religious person says there is no good. You have to find your own good.

[13 : 31] Of course, we can't have unity around that because each person is going to determine a different good. But the gospel says no one is good, only Jesus is good. And so that gives us the humility that we need to actually have unity with each other.

If we are not good, but Jesus is, then we can lay down our preferences and our secondary issues to focus on that. Focus on what is most important, which is the truth and reality of the gospel.

So religious says be good like I'm good. The non-religious says find your own good. And the gospel says no one is good, only Jesus is good. So find your good in him.

And so we find unity as we're striving together for the sake of the gospel, but it's also the gospel that allows us to have unity in that. And so this is the strategy that Paul gives the church as they live in a culture that's pressing in on them.

That they work together with unity and they do it without fear because they know that their heavenly citizenship is more real than their earthly one. But it's not just the Philippians who are going to do something.

[14 : 49] God is at work as well. Remember, we're not just asking how do we respond to opposition, but also what does God do with us? How does he change us? How does he provide for us when we face opposition, when we feel the pressure coming in on us?

I have a uncle, my dad's youngest brother, who has spent his career working for the State Department. He's been stationed all over the world. And at one point, probably 10 or 15 years ago, he was stationed in China.

And while he was stationed in China, a family member went over to visit him and they found on the streets of China an amazing deal. They were selling these North Face rain jackets for the very low price of \$10.

And who knew, right, that North Face was selling their products for so much cheaper in China than they're selling them in the U.S.? And this is a shock. Why are we not just importing these jackets from China? And so these jackets were given as gifts to various people.

I received one and I thought, this is great. I think I was probably in high school at the time that I received it. Had this great North Face logo on it. I could wear it and be clear that I was very cool because I had a North Face jacket.

[16:03] Fast forward to when I'm in college and I decided to take this jacket with me on my study abroad program. This is the jacket that I take with me. It's a traveling study abroad program.

At one point, we were in the city of Delphi, which is in Greece, and there's a rainstorm that comes. So I had my North Face jacket and I put it on.

It continues raining throughout the day and I become very, very wet. Because while this jacket has the logo of North Face on it, it has nothing to do with North Face.

It was never made by North Face. North Face costs are probably higher than \$10 just to make a jacket. And so the point is this. We don't know what's real or not until the storm comes.

We don't know what's real or not until the storm comes. And that's what Paul is telling us in verse 28. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation and that from God.

[17:22] So what does God do for us in the midst of opposition? As we stand, as we strive side by side, God assures us that we belong to Him.

That we are genuine. in. And so one of the ways that God uses opposition in our lives as we're struggling with the forces coming in against us as He looks at us and says, as you have been faithful, you can know even more than ever that you belong to me.

because it's because it's only the people that I adopt and that are mine that are able to stand when the opposition comes.

And so take hope. Be encouraged because you belong to me. And this isn't something that we earn.

It's not something that comes from us. If you know anything about rain jackets, you probably know part of the reason I got soaked. And that's there was no tape on the seams. So the material wasn't terrible but the difference between a real rain jacket that's going to keep you dry for hours and one that won't is that all the seams have tape on the insides that's waterproof.

[18:44] Because that's where the water was coming in. It was through the seams. And so when He says this is a clear sign of your salvation and that from God what He's saying is this, God is the one who puts the tape in your seams.

He's the one who enables you to stand in opposition. And so it's not that you muster up your strength and you earn God's favor but that you were already His.

He had made you and created you and so when the storm comes, when opposition comes and you stand, you can know that it's God who has given you the grace. It's God who's holding you up and sustaining you.

He's the one who made you. And so it's a clear sign of your salvation that what's happening in a small way as you stand against opposition is a sign of what will later happen in a big way.

And so God uses it. He uses it to give us assurance that as we persevere He's saying take heart, be encouraged, don't be frightened because you belong to me my kingdom and my reality is greater than any other that's around you.

[20 : 00] But He doesn't leave it there. That's not, that's just the start of what God does for us in opposition. He says, 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.

Engage in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. Paul's laying out here a principle that he's explained in other letters that he's written which is this, that as the Master walks, so walk His disciples.

As the teacher goes, so go His students. And so if we're followers of Christ, we're going to join with Him. We're going to join with Him not just in His glorification, not just in the new body that He's given, but also in His humiliation that as Christ suffered, we are also going to suffer.

We're not going to suffer to the same extent that He did. We're not going to suffer in the way that He did. Our suffering is not going to earn our salvation in the way that His did. But it's also another way that we know that we belong to Him.

And so when we suffer, we can consider it an honor. It's a gift is what we're told in verse 29. It has been granted to you.

[21 : 21] It has been gifted to you that you would suffer. Paul again is hitting the partnership here in verse 30, reminding them that he is suffering as well. He's in prison.

He's struggling for the gospel. He is being pushed in on by the Roman Empire and so are they. And so they're together in it. But they also know that this too confirms that they belong to God.

As the master goes, so go his followers. Some of you are perhaps familiar with Jeremiah Denton. Jeremiah was a prisoner of war during the Vietnam War.

He was in the infamous Hanoi Hilton and he was the man who became famous because when he was put on TV, after months of torture, he blinked in Morse code the word torture.

And that was the first time as Americans we knew a little bit about what was going on with our POWs. He later became one of the Alcatraz 11. He was put into solitary confinement for multiple months for all of the day except for 10 minutes each day.

[22 : 26] And so his return was highly anticipated. People were waiting for him when he landed at Clark Air Base when he was finally released. And these are the words that he had.

These are the first words that he had to say to the nation. We are honored to have had the opportunity to serve our country under difficult circumstances, he said.

We are profoundly grateful to our commander-in-chief and to our nation for this day. We are honored to have had the opportunity to serve our country under difficult circumstances.

So what Paul is telling us is that when we face opposition, that suffering is the honor of being associated with Christ. In the same way that Jeremiah didn't have been able to suffer for the sake of his country, he had the benefits of citizenship, he had the joys of being an American, he also took part in the suffering of defending our country.

So also, those who are citizens of the gospel have the honor and the privilege of suffering for the sake of Christ.

[23 : 37] In fact, we find this out in other parts of Scripture as well. In Acts 5, Christians are preaching the gospel, they're taken, and they are beaten. And after they're beaten and released, it says this, then they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

And every day in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. In other words, the opposition that they faced only emboldened them to strive more and more side by side in unity for the gospel.

And it was an honor to suffer dishonor for the name because it was something that was given to them by Christ himself and something that he enabled them to do.

We've already sung that today. We sang in God and grace of God and glory, grant us wisdom, grant us courage for the living of these days. And so it's God that grants us the wisdom and the courage.

It's not something that we muster up. He's the one who puts the tape on the seams. But we're also going to sing this as well in just a minute. Remember, we're asking how do we respond to opposition?

[24 : 47] We respond by working together, focusing on what truly matters, focusing on the gospel. What does God do? How does he work in our lives in opposition? He confirms for us that we are his, that we belong to him.

And he gives us the honor of serving under difficult circumstances. And so that's what we're going to sing here of Though Church Arise. We're going to sing in verse 1 that we would have the strength that God has given.

It's God who gives the strength. It's him who gives us what we need to stand up in opposition. We're going to be striving together for what matters, what's important. In verse 2, we're going to stand against the devil's lies rather than each other.

And it's Christ whose death and resurrection enables all of it. And we'll see that two verses later. Come see the cross where love and mercy meet as the Son of God is stricken. Then see his foes lie crushed beneath his feet for the conqueror has risen.

It's Jesus' victory that allows us to suffer because we know the end of the story. And it's his victory that gives us the strength and the courage and the wisdom to stand when opposition comes.

[26 : 00] please pray with me. Dear Father in Heaven, we thank you that you have chosen us as yours, that you have given us the opportunity as we'll find out in a couple weeks to shine as lights in the world.

But we confess that it's not easy and that we often face opposition and so we ask that you would hold us up, that you'd prevent us from saying, be good like I'm good. But instead, we would be able to stand strong as we say, no one is good, but Jesus is good.

And so for that, we are honored to stand and suffer for the sake of his name. We ask this in Jesus' name because we have earned none of this, but he has earned it for us. And so we ask it in his name.

Amen. Amen.