

Looking to Jesus - striving side-by-side

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 January 2024

Preacher: Fiona Neden

[0 : 00] I have to confess, many of you will know this, that I am a bit of a history nut. There seems to be a lot of podcasts around at the moment, and they're just up my street.

The rest is history, I don't know if you know that one. Rex Factor as well, you might not know that one. And if you're very juvenile like me and Andrew, you're dead to me, which is a BBC one. One of our boys, Freddie, even gave me the book, The Rest is History. That was my main Christmas present from Freddie, so I can really recommend it, you can borrow it off me another time.

Now one thing the Romans really knew about was standing side by side in battle formation. You might remember something about this from school, most of us looked at the Romans at school. They knew that they had to rely on the person, either side of them, to stand firm. And when we read this passage, I'm always reminded of Roman soldiers.

[1 : 03] And the Christian life is a battle too. But the amazing thing is that we're not in it alone. God is with us, and our brothers and sisters are with us too.

These verses in Philippians, which many of us did in growth group not too long ago, are really amazing verses. To give a little context before we dive into our passage today, Paul is writing with Timothy to the church in Philippi.

He's in prison, but he's still living for Jesus and wanting the word to be taught to those who don't yet know him. And despite his circumstances, he's rejoicing.

Famously, just a little bit before our passage, up in verse 21, he wrote, To live is Christ, and to die is gain. So Paul's writing to encourage this baby church in Philippi.

And at the end of chapter 1, our passage today, he starts to talk about the church standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

[2 : 13] So that's the second half of verse 27, if you've got it open in front of you. So this morning, we're going to cover from verse 27 down to 2 verse 11, as we've had read.

And we're going to look at this passage in three chunks, and it's all there on your handout, 1, 2, 3. First of all, standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side.

Secondly, being of the same mind. And thirdly, look to Jesus and follow him. So, first point. Standing firm, striving side by side.

Let's look at verses 27 to 30. In verse 27, we read, 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.

Serving is hard. We live in a fallen world. We're sinners, ministering to and living with other sinners. So we often feel exhausted, overwhelmed, or not able to carry on.

[3 : 32] And often we try to do things on our own strength. Or is that just me? But Paul is reminding his readers here, that it's the gospel of Christ, that he has saved us.

He has done the heavy lifting, and our job, in our generation, as it was in the first century, is to stand firm, being of like mind, and working together for the fervorance of his kingdom.

Verse 28, have a look. 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.

Again, Paul is reminding them, and us today, that Christians are saved. Not only that, saved by God himself.

And therefore, there is no need to fear any sort of opposition. Now, it might seem a little frightening at the moment, in England here, with numbers of leaders of the Church of England not standing by biblical teaching.

[4 : 43] But Christians are told not to be frightened. If we stick to biblical teaching, there is nothing to fear, even though we feel weak, and look weak, in the world's eyes.

In God's plan, we have salvation. So in our situation, as we stand up for biblical truth, we might be mocked, individually and corporately, we might have to endure the scoffers we were warned about in Jude recently on Sunday mornings.

It was like that for the Christians in the first century, and it's still the same for us today. We might also feel it's been perhaps harder work during an interregnum period, since Simon left, and before the next man has started.

We might have felt it's very difficult to stand firm and to strive side by side. But the Lord sees everything, and this is what he wants us to do.

Continue to live lives worthy of the gospel of his beloved son, the Lord Jesus, as we saw back in verse 27. Let's move on to verses 29 to 30.

[6 : 01] On first reading, this seems a bit odd. Let me read 29. Follow along. For it has been granted to you for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake.

Did you notice the word granted? It's been granted to you that you should suffer. This is very difficult for us to get our heads round. We automatically think that it's not a privilege to suffer for his sake.

But looking back just a few hundred years to the Reformation in England, that is just what the English Christians were called to do. Big time.

Many ended up going to the stake for their beliefs, men and women, including several bishops and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, you may have heard of.

They were granted to suffer for his sake. And we know across the world, many, many Christians every day are killed or suffer very greatly as they stand for Jesus.

[7 : 14] But they and we are told not to be frightened by our opponents. God's on our side. Verse 30 helps us see because Paul is an excellent example of this.

Have a look at verse 30. Engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. Paul is a role model for the Philippian church and for us as well.

He's been in conflict and he's still engaged in conflict. Our job is simply to stand firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side as a church family and not to be frightened in anything by our opponents or by your opponents.

One example of striving side by side for us at Grace Church recently was the wreath making events back in November. We were standing firm, giving a straight gospel talk and working together to make Jesus known.

In case you haven't had enough history yet, it wasn't only the Romans who did good defensive work with their shields. Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings used shield walls too.

[8 : 29] I don't know if you've seen any of the TV shows about them, but one of my favourites is about Uhtred of Bebbenberg. He's from Northumberland. He used shield walls.

The tactic of shield walls is very simple. They stand side by side and kind of like a turtle formation and then they could advance and retreat together.

And the key thing is striving side by side and never giving up. The enemy can't get in. Well, that's the same for us. The devil would love to get in amongst a Christian church's shield wall defences. He loves to divide and conquer. God tells us simply to stand firm. So that's the first point. Standing firm, striving side by side.

On to point two, next point on your handout. Being of the same mind. And we're looking at verses one to four here. As you can see, Paul starts these verses by telling his readers how they can make his joy complete.

[9 : 34] Have a look, verse two. Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. You can see there's a strong theme here.

Paul wants his spiritual children, verse three, to do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

We're looking at ESV, but the NIV also adds vain conceit here, which I think is also very helpful. Vanity. So Paul wants us to be other person focused.

Paul longs for these Christians to be marked by humility. And in fact, this is very counter-cultural. And to think of or count others as more significant than ourselves is not really a natural state.

We know this. We're all selfish to some extent deep down, but it's clearly a central factor in Paul's encouragement of the Philippians. To copy Paul and to live for Jesus.

[10:41] Verse four. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. There's no getting away from it. Christ calls us to love others and put them first.

Paul is modelling that in the first century and wants the young Philippian church to follow suit. And it's no different for us today. We live in the same part of salvation history, meaning we're also living between the first coming and the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

So we're to be of the same mind and of one mind. As well as being a history nut, I'm also into sports, which some of you might know.

Now, growing up with a Welsh father, my rugby hero was J.P.R. Williams. He was a famous fullback and incidentally also won junior Wimbledon, beating David Lloyd in the singles final. He died last week and his obituary was in the paper. One of the things which distinguished his Welsh and British Lions winning teams was their cohesiveness.

[11:51] You could see as they played the way they were in one mind and how they worked together in both attack and defence. And we need to copy this also, being of one mind.

So the team mind. What might this look like in practice for us? Being of the same mind is a bit like singing off the same hymn sheet.

Or maybe in a school staff room. Or the teachers having the same standards or rules as they deal with their pupils. Putting up a united front.

What does that look like for me as an individual? Or for us as a church family? I guess it's being prepared to sit under the word.

Spending time in our Bibles. Working as a unit to look out for the interests of others. Caring for one another in lots of different ways.

[12:47] Like encouraging others along to church or growth group. Or making sure we personally are doing the much underrated ministry of just turning up.

It would also include loving the lost. And working together to reach others for the gospel. Like we do at Scallywags or through growth group outreach.

We were trying to do that last summer term. So complete my joy, Paul says. Being of the same mind. Now on to our third and final point.

Look to Jesus and follow him. Verses 5 to 11. We continue our theme on the mind. Have a look at verse 5 with me. Have this mind among yourselves.

Which is yours in Christ Jesus. Now Jesus is the perfect. Supreme example of other person centredness. He is not only a role model of course.

[13:48] He is our unique saviour. But he is also a role model. Look at verses 6 and 7. Who though he was in the form of God.

Did not count equality with God. A thing to be grasped. But made himself nothing. Taking the form of a servant. Being born in the likeness of men. Jesus came as a servant.

God the son. Born into this world. Taking on flesh. And very clearly all the angst and hurt. Which goes with that.

He was brought low. He humbled himself. And was obedient to his father. To the point of death. Even death on a cross. The most humiliating form of death.

In the Roman world. That's verse 8. And verse 9 goes on. Therefore. God has highly exalted him. And bestowed on him.

[14:49] The name that is above every name. So at the name of Jesus. Every knee should bow. On heaven. And on earth. And under the earth. And every tongue confess.

That Jesus Christ is Lord. To the glory of God the Father. Paul wants his readers. And us to marvel. At Jesus.

The Holy Spirit himself. Has given us these verses. So we can read them. In our generation. Throughout the Bible. We have pictures. Of the low.

Being brought high. Being exalted. Think of Mary. The teenage virgin mother. Of the son of God. Think of some of the Isaiah. Passages. We looked at.

At growth group. Last year. Paul. The great apostle. Is chained up. In prison. He's brought low. Humanly speaking. His ministry.

[15:45] Looks fragile. At best. But God. Gives grace. To the humble. This is the normal. Pattern. Of ordinary. Christian service. The servant.

Hearted. Will one day. Be lifted high. Like the Lord. Jesus himself. And one day. As verse 10. And 11. Tell us. Every knee. Will bow. What a mind blowing.

Thought that is. Do we live. As if that's true. The one. Who flung stars. Into space. The servant. King. The creator. Of the universe. Came in all. Humility. To put others. First. At school. I learned. Much. Much. Much. Later. That my head.

Teacher. Had been. A real. Christian. She used. To get us. To sing. At the name. Of Jesus. Every knee. Shall bow. The words. Were straight.

[16:38] From scripture. And talked. Of Jesus. Being humbled. For a season. I've got the music. And words. If anyone. Wants to bash it. Out on the piano. Later. I'm not.

A pianist. When I became. A Christian. In the 1980s. There was a very popular song around. I don't know if you remember it. Some of you will. By Graham Kendrick.

This is our God. The servant king. These songs. Are a great reminder. Of who Jesus is. What he's done. And what will one day.

Happen. In history. There have been many. Amazing. Christian women. As well as men. Who have served God. Faithfully. Humbly.

In a servant. Hearted way. And I recommend. I basically looked at. A whole load of biographies. And I've got tons more. So please come borrow some. This is a book. I bought recently.

[17:32] Though. Called Feminine Threads. And I put it on the handout. It's quite. A history book really. But about Christian women. Throughout history. From Roman times.

So I would be very happy. To lend that to someone. That's a great read. But I've got many other biographies. But there are also women today. Living now. Who are also a great encouragement to us.

To help us to look to Jesus. And to follow him. For example. You may or may not have heard. Of Joni Erickson Tarder. The quadriplegic Christian. Who's been involved in.

Much ministry. She's mentioned in this book. Or Emily Foreman. Who went to a Muslim country. And wrote a book. We died before we came here. Of her experiences.

Serving Jesus. There. There. But there are many others too. Jesus is the one. We look to. The incredibly. Humble. Servant King. And we.

[18:27] With the Spirit's help. Are to aim. To have this mind. Among you. So to conclude. What does it look like. For me. To stand firm. Striving side by side.

Together. In one mind. To be looking to. And following Jesus. What does it look like. For us corporately. As a church family. How will this passage.

Affect. How we think. Act. Feel. And pray. What does it look like. Right now. And what about. A few years.

Down the line. We're going to have a time. In a moment. To reflect. On the passage. And to pray. Paul wants us. To focus our minds.

Remember Jesus. And what an incredible servant. He was to his people. And he wants us. To copy him. With his help. We have the Spirit in us.

[19:23] If we're his. And he will help us. To be standing firm. Striving side by side. In one mind. In one spirit. As we look to Jesus. And continue to follow him.

So. Remember the shield wall. Remember the sports teams. Of one mind. Remember our incredible. Humble. Servant's King.