

Philippians 1:27-2:4

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: 08 May 2022

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 0 0] I'm very aware that we've just had three brilliant sermons from the three baptism candidates, and it would not be wrong for us to just to hold up those three testimonies, which were so real, so Christ-focused and faithful, and just underline some of the thoughts in them.

However, I have a sermon, and we need to move on in our series. And so I'm sorry, let's just call this part two of a continued thinking about Christ.

Congratulations to all you mothers out there. Happy Mother's Day. My mother died five years ago, and as I said at her funeral, I was her favourite child. I have two that work better in Australia than it does here.

I have two lovely sisters. This week, Bronwyn and I celebrated our 42nd wedding anniversary, and I wonder if there's anyone here who knows what the gift is for the 42nd anniversary.

Does anyone know? It's real estate. So Bronwyn is getting two potted plants. Let's turn to Philippians.

[1 : 2 0] If you take open your Bibles, Philippians 1, 27 to 2.4. As you're finding that, I've mentioned before the name Leslie Newbigin, an Anglican missionary and bishop.

He and his wife served in India for more than 42 years. Finally, he became the bishop of Madras. And when he retired, they never went back to the UK, but when he retired in 1972, he and his wife hitchhiked all the way from the east coast of India across Pakistan, Afghanistan, Persia, Syria, as it was then Turkey, and up through Europe.

And when he returned to the UK, he was shocked because the culture in the UK had shifted from a broadly Christian culture to a clearly post-Christian culture. Not too different than the Hindu pluralist culture that he'd worked in for over 40 years.

And in his view, and I agree with him, that the Western culture is not a secular culture. It's with no gods. It's more neo-pagan with false gods.

But the church had continued to act as though nothing had changed. And he began a very busy retirement in which he wrote over 20 books.

[2 : 3 9] I commend it to all of you who are retired. And he began calling on the church to have a renewed missionary encounter with the culture. And he said, in the modern Western post-Christian culture, the only real access people around us have to the gospel is through the quality of life lived out in congregations.

In other words, the key to mission, according to Newbigin, and I quote, is the congregation of men and women who believe the gospel and live by it. Now, as far as I can tell, and I haven't read every of his books, but he never taught in the book of Philippians, which is a pity, really, because the first half of Philippians makes this point better and simpler and under the power of the Holy Spirit.

Not saying his books are not worth reading. They are. But what the apostle does in the first half of Philippians is he shows how the gospel of Christ creates a particular kind of community.

And the key to the progress and protection of the gospel in the pagan city of Philippi and in our city of Vancouver is the quality of life in the Christian community.

Thank you. Thank you. That's a response from someone who's baptized. Paul says it's the reality of love in the mutual relationships.

[4 : 1 0] It's our engagement in the unity with each other and striving side by side for the faith of the gospel that is the key. In other words, the biggest barrier to the advance and defense of the gospel from Philippians, which I want to show you, is not suffering.

It's not persecution. It's not neo-paganism or secularism or the hostility of the surrounding culture. It's not that Christians are a minority.

It's pride. In the church, which undermines the reality of unity, it's fear and pride that show itself in disengaging from each other in the church, where they're then becoming passengers and then becoming consultants and then becoming critics and then becoming a hindrance to the work of the gospel.

That's what this passage is about. So if you look in chapter 128, there's the first mention of opponents. You remember the way the church started in Philippi?

Wonderful and terrible. The Lord opened the hearts of people from very different places in society. And then Apostle Paul and Silas were dragged in front of a crowd beaten and then whipped with flogged with sticks and thrown into the stocks in prison.

[5 : 31] And although they were released, Christianity in Philippi was still regarded as bizarre, morally outrageous and completely un-Philippian.

But the focus in this section and the focus throughout this letter is not the opponents, because the issue is not suffering, it's not the opposition, but how the Philippians are responding and what that means for the progress of the gospel.

So what the apostle does in our passage today, and for those of you who want to take notes, he gives one command, then two applications. One command, two applications. And the command is at the beginning of verse 27.

The first words, only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. It's a wonderful thing, isn't it, when a preacher stops and he says, look, what I'm really trying to say is this.

If you don't remember anything else that I'm saying, just remember this one. What I'm trying to get across is this. And that's what Paul does here in 127. Only. The only is huge.

[6 : 36] This is the most important command in all of the whole of the book of Philippians. It's like those games you play. Remember, you might have played this game where you imagine your house burning down.

You have to go in and get three things and then just one thing. One thing you can save from your house. What will it be? And it's usually the photo albums, right? Here is the one thing the apostle wants to get across to the Philippians.

He says, only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. And if you look at the text, there's a little footnote in ESV in the Greek text. It says, only behave as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Which is quite brilliant, isn't it? He doesn't say, I just remember 10 rules or eight highly effective habits of growing Christians. He says, there's one all-embracing dynamic and positive thing in everything that you do.

Live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ. Because Christianity is something you add on top of your other priorities. Christianity is having a different home.

[7 : 41] We're citizens of a different place. Different passport. Different compass. Different loves. Different hopes. Not ruled by the outlook and values of those around us.

And since we belong to another place and another of order of things, we see this life in a way that's different. We have a security and a liberty, knowing our true home is elsewhere, to dive deep into the life here and to wring out of this life all the juice there is in living here while being fully engaged with our city here and fully belonging to another city.

It's a great picture. And the Philippians knew exactly what he was talking about. Because the city of Philippi was the first city in the empire to be given colonial status. What that meant is it's a little piece of Rome.

So although Rome's a thousand kilometres away, this city is a little piece of Rome. And they live in north-eastern Greece, but their attitudes and privileges come from living, come from Rome.

Notice, please, in verse 27, he does not say, live as citizens worthy of the kingdom. He doesn't say, live as citizens worthy of Christ.

[8 : 54] Don't live as citizens worthy of heaven, which I find quite strange. He says, live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ. The truths of the coming and the life and the death and the resurrection and the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ, he says, they're not just historical facts.

It is through these things that God releases the dynamic power of salvation in this world and in our lives to change us and to make us behave and have different motives differently.

And the apostle knows exactly what he's talking about. In the last few weeks, he's already given them a wonderfully practical illustration of what it looks like. Ben said last night, why is Paul so

happy?

You know, he's a thousand kilometres away from these people. He's chained between two guards. He's facing torture and execution. How can he be so full of joy? It's because he sees everything through the lens of the gospel.

If I was in Paul's shackles, shoes, sandals, whatever, and I was writing to the Philippians, my letter would go like this, dear Philippians, help me. Do you know of any great lawyers who can get, please help me.

[10:08] It's not Paul. No grumbling, no complaining, the opposite. He says in verse 12, we already covered this, that what's happening to me is serve to advance the gospel because not only do I have a captive audience once every Roman guard shift, but the other brothers and sisters around me in Rome have become more brave and witness.

He's not thinking about himself. He's thinking about how the daily, ordinary circumstances of his life serve the gospel. We have this strange spiritual split personality over this.

You know, on the one side, we think of ordinary life over here, you know, shopping and eating and entertainment. Then we think on the other side as a spiritual life of going to church and prayer and those sorts of things.

But if we live as a citizen of the gospel of Christ, Jesus pulls the wall down between those things and gives us a unity and integrity where we have one life, one whole life.

So as the apostle faces death or release in verse 20, you know what his prayer is? Oh, well, that Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or death. A wonderful, wonderful thing to say.

[11:22] So here is the headline of the book. Here is the one thing that I would love for you to take away and apply in your own lives and in the ordinary circumstances.

Behave as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ. What does that mean, Paul? Well, he gives us two applications of what it means. The end of chapter one, it means engaging with each other in the congregation.

And then in 2, 1 to 4, in humility, seeking unity with each other. It's very simple, very practical.

Number one, it means engaging versus 27 to 30.

One of the things that's difficult is often in the early days of being a Christian, you find that your friends begin to oppose you.

It's a very strange experience. You find your friends are happy to talk about God, but they don't like talking about Jesus. When you talk about Jesus, they think you've lost your mind. And they treat you with suspicion as though somehow you've betrayed them.

[12:26] And one of the temptations is to believe that your suffering is a bad omen, that you're doing something wrong, that God's not pleased with you.

And of course, suffering is never good in itself. But when we suffer for Christ's sake, it confirms our faith. And Paul says it's a sign from God, which may convict those who are hostile around us.

You see verse 28? It's a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation and that from God. The threats and opposition are meant to discourage and dishearten us.

And the one temptation that comes with it is fear. And along with fear comes the temptation to disconnect and detach ourselves from other believers, to just distance ourselves a little bit from these other crazy Christians.

And the apostle turns that upside down. He says, suffering is a proof of God's grace. And it ought to drive you to be more deeply engaged with your fellow believers.

[13:34] Verse 29. It has been granted. That's the word grace gift. It has been grace gifted to you, that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer him for his sake, engaged in the same conflict you saw I had and now hear that I have.

This last week, Bronwyn and I spoke, had the privilege of speaking at the British Columbia Mennonite Brethren Pastors and Spouses Retreat. It's a mouthful. And we didn't talk about infant baptism once.

We were very well behaved. It was a great experience. And the brethren have a noble tradition of pacifism. And it is a noble tradition.

But as I said, when it comes to spiritual things, if you pretend there is no conflict for the gospel of Christ, if you pretend there's no spiritual battle, Satan will just gobble you up.

It's not enough just to believe. It's not enough to enjoy the benefits of Christ on your own terms. Nor is it enough just to say, oh, there's a conflict going on over there.

[14:47] I'm going to pray for them. Paul calls the Philippians and all believers to be engaged in the same conflict that he is for the advance and confirmation of the gospel.

To engage more deeply with other brothers and sisters, he's saying, if you've disengaged from the church, Philippians, it's time to turn back and re-engage.

And the reason for that is not something any of us can do on our own. Verse 27. He says, I want to hear that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

Standing firm together is not something we do on our own. It's not an individualistic exercise. One spirit, it's a heart thing. One mind is literally one-souled.

Striving side by side is a compound. It's together trying side by side. He's talking about a harmony of affection and feeling here. You can't strive for the gospel in a way that's cold to those around you.

[15:56] The gospel can't leave anyone neutral. And when it comes to the gospel, there are no sidelines. There are no passengers. There are no spectators. And churches die when members act in this way.

Well, I agree with you, but I'm not going to do anything with you. I'm not going to help you toward that aim. I'm going to keep my distance and only engage when I know it's going to help me. So here is the first application of what it means to be citizens worthy of the gospel.

It's to engage with one another by striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. Those of you who are new to St. John's, we had a 10-year crisis with our diocese of biblical truth.

And during that time, I came back to these verses at the end of Philippians 1 a couple of times a week. They were an enormous strength and help to me and encouragement. And we did strive by side for the faith of the gospel.

We were engaged with the issue and with each other. And it's a complete miracle that God brought us through that. And things are different now. Here's my question. Do you think it's less important now to strive side by side for the faith of the gospel?

[17:11] Do you think the fact that the culture has changed so quickly around us, that we as Christians are treated with suspicion, makes it more important? I think we are like Gregor in Franz Kafka's little novel, *Metamorphosis*.

Remember, he wakes up one morning to discover that he has been transformed into a hideously ugly insect, a massive insect, and remains that way. It's not that Christianity has disappeared from public life in Canada, but we found ourselves very quickly viewed as hideously ugly insects.

And when we talk about Jesus, it's neither interesting nor intelligible to the average Vancouverite. So for the progress of the gospel, we really need to re-engage with each other and strive side by side for the faith of the gospel.

And I know COVID meant we had to disengage with everyone on everything, but it's time to re-engage together again, to look outward, step up to help others.

I know many of us are doing this in wonderful ways. To invite others into our lives, to introduce others to others, to pray with intentionality and consistency, to talk to those you know, to find ways that are ordinary to serve.

[18:32] This is the first application of living as citizens worthy of the gospel. The second in chapter 2, verses 1 to 4, is heart unity. Heart unity.

The apostle becomes even more practical, can you believe it? He's trying to reach the hearts of his readers. Because of this temptation to disengage, what happens next is, if we disengage, we then become spectators, and then the next temptation is to become consultants, and then the next temptation is to become critics.

Disengage, standoffish, looking down on others, holding on to bitternesses, why haven't they done what I think is right? And then you build your own fellowship around your own needs.

Well, the apostle will have none of that. And he gives this heartbreaking encouragement and appeal in chapter 2, verse 1. He says, is there any encouragement in Christ? Is there anything to stir your heart in Christ?

Any comfort in love? Any power of the love of the Father in you? Any participation? Is there any reality to the experience of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit?

[19:51] Any affection and sympathy? Any tender compassion toward each other in the congregation? Then he says, here's the command of us, to complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, and being in full accord and of one mind.

Here is Paul the pastor, and he says, I want you to make me happy. Because it is the job of the congregation to make the pastor happy. You thought I'd say that?

While I'm at the front and no one's going to come up and disagree with me. I know, I know. You only do that when the minister has godly aims for you. However, the New Testament does command congregations to make their leaders happy.

If you don't believe me, Hebrews 13 says, Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account.

Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage too. Do you know, Ben, I think we should preach a series on this. I'm going off topic.

[20 : 54] What Paul is doing here is he's saying, all the experience of the love of the Father and the fellowship of the Spirit and the joy of Christ are meant to translate into a same soulness, same love, same mind, where I don't put my ideas or my plans above yours or you above mine, but we seek the good of the whole body.

Victor, I'm having a little bit of echoing. I wonder if you could just turn me down a bit, please. Thank you. Verse 3, do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, or as it says in this version, rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Isn't that great? So everyone agrees that society is way more divided, right? We're more divided, aren't we? There's more suspicion, more discord, more hostility on every measure around us.

It's between nations, it's within nations, it's within families. And most people expect the church to stand up and make some vague statements calling for, you know, brotherhood and understanding and peace.

That's not what Paul does. He unmasks what's behind all the division and it's this. It's selfish ambition and conceit. It's literally empty pride and narcissism.

[22 : 22] He's not saying, oh, just forget your differences so that you can all get it. Why can't we all just get along? He says, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that you can treat others as more important than yourself, more significant than yourself.

And if we could do just this one thing at St. John's, it would make a massive difference. It doesn't mean this.

It doesn't mean if you're an expert musician, you treat beginner musicians as though they're better musically than you. But it does mean treating that person as a more significant person.

Because the true obstacle to unity is not different levels of expertise. It's just pride. Our unity is not challenged by having different opinions on things or different backgrounds or different politics or even different views of COVID.

What is a challenge to our unity is pride. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

[23 : 29] Paul's not saying you shouldn't look after your own interests. Of course we should. But in Christ, that's not all we do. We have to take into account the interests of others. Are you doing that?

This is very different than coming to church to see a couple of your good friends and ignoring everyone else. It means taking steps to put yourself at the disposal of others in the church.

You see, what would it look like here in 2022 if we were doing this? Imagine we took what the apostle said to heart. Imagine a stranger came into our church and was with us for six months and wrote down their impressions.

What would they say? They would say something like this. You know those Christians at St John's? They treat each other with more significance than themselves and they do it with humility.

Not just one or two of them, but all of them. It's like they have the same mind and the same love and unity of heart and soul. They're willing to do what's best for others.

[24 : 37] Absolutely. And they don't do anything from selfish ambition or arrogance. And I'm not sure to make of what they all believe, but they reckon they found something better than everything. And the amazing thing is they treated me as more significant than themselves.

And when they talked about their differences politically or in COVID, although they disagree and have different views, because they've got a greater love for Christ and see him as more precious than anything else, they still treat each other with great kindness and understanding.

It's like that church is the only place in our culture where everyone has put down their weapons of war and found something more important than being right. They've created a place where their unity is more fundamental and beautiful because it's so quiet, not loud, not pointing at itself, but

pointing past them to something else.

It's like their unity with each other is supernatural. Wouldn't that be great? Well, it's the quality of our life together. That is the key to our testimony to the reality of the gospel.

And what makes a church effective in the eyes of Jesus Christ is not the brilliant programs or concert music or magnificent buildings, thankfully. It's the quality of our relationships marked by humble serving.

[25 : 57] And as Christ the Lord Jesus is with us this morning, what does he see? I give this to you. Are we seeking to live our lives beyond this building in our daily lives in a way that is worthy as being citizens of the gospel of Christ?

Do we do the ordinary things in our lives to Christ? Are we doing what we can to strive side by side for the faith of the gospel? Or are we disengaging and disappointed, becoming consultants and critics?

Do you treat others in this congregation as more significant than yourself? Or is your heart filling with pride and selfishness? I ask the question.

Because the key to mission is the quality of our fellowship in unity. And the key to our unity is humility. Because our unity is not an end in itself.

We're not trying to create a happy church that meets your needs. Unity is for the sake of the progress of the gospel. And you may feel as though you've been trying and failing here.

[27 : 06] And you wonder how to change and where the power comes from. That's what we'll look at next week in the next passage. So let's kneel and pray. Okay.