

Philippians 1:27-2:4 (PM)

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[0 : 00] Well, God's word for us tonight, which is Philippians 1, is about two things. It's about suffering for Christ, and it's about unity in Christ.

Suffering and unity. So if you're suffering tonight, or if you feel isolated, God's word in Philippians 1 is for you.

When you're suffering or isolated, we face the temptation to give up. And so what's needed to endure suffering and disunity as Christians is spiritual stamina.

And our text tonight tells us how to get it. Christians in Canada struggle to have spiritual stamina. There was a study 10 years ago that found of children in our country who were raised going to church, only one-third will continue going to church once they reach adulthood.

There's another study, this one in America more recently, that found only 10% of church-going children become what they call resilient disciples by the time they reach 18.

[1 : 14] We're living through a crisis of faith. In our society, followers of Jesus are struggling to have spiritual stamina.

And many of us, or our friends, or our children, are giving up. Paul, in our text, is worried for the Christians to whom he writes this letter.

And he's worried that as suffering comes, their unity will not hold, and they will fall away. If you have your Bible open, you'll see the first word in verse 27, the beginning of our text, is the word only. Now that word in the original language could have been translated nevertheless. Or you could have paraphrased it. There is this one thing that I'm worried about for you.

See, Paul has been praising the Philippian Christians in all of chapter 1. And now he pauses his praise to tell them the one danger he foresees. He writes in chapter 1, verse 27, Nevertheless, here's my one concern.

[2 : 25] That you live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. And in verse 29, For it's been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake.

Paul's concern is that the Christians in Philippi show spiritual stamina in their suffering. That they endure in faith when the hardships come. And Paul tells them how to persevere at the end of verse 27.

He commands them to stand firm in one spirit. To have one mind. To strive side by side as one for the faith of the gospel.

Paul preaches to the Philippian church that trouble is brewing. So be one in Christ. Have one spirit. Have one mind. Strive side by side.

He's saying the way to weather spiritual suffering is through our unity with one another. You see, the way I stand firm in my faith is by having you standing next to me.

[3 : 29] Holding me up when I feel like falling. So that I can then hold you up when you feel weak. The way to persevere in faith is by bearing one another's burdens.

Having one mind. One spirit. Because we are one body. The life of following Jesus is not meant to be a solo effort. To be a Christian is to be invited to enter a communal life.

A common life. A life lived in communion with God the Father. Through Christ and the Holy Spirit. As well as a life lived in communion with each other.

We are invited through the gospel to experience a life together. To be Christ's body collectively. Enjoying unity with him as well as with one another. And let me tell you as one who has experienced it here.

Living your life in a community of faith that is of one mind. One spirit. Striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. Is the absolute best life that there is.

[4 : 35] It's life to the full. Because we're made for relationship. We need it like we need oxygen. No man is an island. No Christian is intended to follow Jesus alone.

So the way to endure in faith despite suffering. Is to stand firm in one spirit with other believers. And the text will show us how.

Now the pandemic has brought all of us suffering. In one form or another. And it's isolated all of us. And it's been long enough now.

That we've actually got used to this isolation. And used to this pain. It's become our new normal. Some of us have Stockholm Syndrome.

We've fallen in love with the life our COVID captor has enslaved us in. And so we're used to being isolated. We're scared of returning to living a social, communal life together.

[5 : 37] But it's time to break those unhealthy habits. It's time to help one another stand firm in one spirit. To strive side by side for the faith of the gospel.

Many of us right now are desperate for Christian fellowship and relationship and support. There are people who are suffering in our midst. If you're online.

We miss you here. We understand there are good reasons why some of you are not here. I'm not trying to guilt trip you or put you in any sort of danger. But pastorally I do worry about you.

Because I worry that you're isolated in faith. I worry that you're not experiencing the fellowship that Christ invites all of us to enjoy with one another in him.

I worry that you're struggling to have spiritual stamina against the pressures to leave the faith.

Because I worry despite watching now, you may not have close relationships with others in this community.

[6 : 41] Paul implores us in Philippians 1 to stand firm, to have one mind. To strive side by side for the faith of the gospel. But that's next to impossible. If we don't know who you are.

Or if we haven't seen you in six months. Or if we don't know what you're struggling with. And how we can be supporting you. In that same Christian study I mentioned earlier.

It found that Canadian young adults who have left the church. Which remember is two out of three of the people who grew up in the church. Well 50% of those people have left the faith. But 50% have not.

So that means that in our country. There are thousands upon thousands. Maybe millions. Of people who consider themselves Christians. Who believe in the gospel.

And they believe in Jesus. But they are not involved in any form in a Christian community. They're my friends. They're the people I grew up with. They're the people we used to see in our pews.

[7 : 42] And so if that's you. Paul pleads with you here. From the isolation of a prison cell. To be one. Stand firm as one.

Stand firm as one. With one mind. Striving side by side. Elsewhere in scripture we're told. Do not give up meeting together. Because we are called to support one another in faith.

Especially in the midst of suffering. So if you are isolated in faith. Here in person or online. Giving you a very gentle. Maybe not so gentle.

Encouragement. To seek ways to connect. And enter into community with other Christians. This service is bursting with opportunities for fellowship right now.

There's women's gatherings. And a women's day retreat at the end of the month. There's men's discipleship groups. There's coffee and tea after our services. There's soup Sunday next week. Our prayer ministry is restarting tonight.

[8 : 39] So during the last hymn you can go over there. If you need prayer. And Jeremy and Paisley will be available. Friendships are forming and sprouting here. As the clouds of COVID disappear.

So come. Enjoy. Take a risk. Reach out to someone you know. And ask if they would meet with you. If you're not meeting in person yet.

Then talk to them on the phone. Or in person. Or online. Or whatever. So that you can share life together. And support each other. And ensure that you are all standing firm in one spirit.

Now if you're isolated and you don't know anyone. Then come to church. Connect with me. My job is literally to help you find community here. Our faith requires perseverance.

Perseverance. And perseverance requires community. And the reason we need stamina in faith. Is because all of us will experience suffering.

[9 : 38] Look at verse where. Look at where verse 27 now leads. Paul writes. Nevertheless let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Standing firm in one spirit with one mind.

Striving side by side for the unity of the faith. Verse 28. And not frightened by your opponents. Because it's been granted to you. That for the sake of Christ.

You should not only believe in him. You should also suffer for his sake. Engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had. And you hear that I now still have.

Paul writes there that God grants us suffering. It's the same word as grace. God graces us suffering.

He gifts us suffering. For the sake of Christ. The church in Philippi was born out of the crucible of suffering. Read Acts 16.

[10 : 36] It's wild. And yet into that context. Paul saw that suffering is an invitation for us to draw closer to Christ. And to one another.

So friends if you believe in Jesus. It will be granted to you to suffer for him. Our suffering can take any form.

Many forms. But whatever it is. Paul here sanctifies our suffering. He tells us that it's happening for Christ's sake.

That somehow Jesus may be glorified through our hardship. Paul points to suffering as a gift. In part because it now grants us the opportunity to grow in our unity together.

Suffering unites us. Suffering provides us the opportunity to stand firm together. In one spirit. With one mind. Striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

[11 : 40] I mean look at the people of Ukraine right now. Look at the western democratic world. In my lifetime I don't think there's been such oneness of mind. That's been born out of the crucible of unbelievable suffering.

So if you're suffering tonight. You do not need to carry that burden alone. There are people here who will walk with you. Stand with you.

Weep with you. Pray with you. There are sisters and brothers in faith who will strive side by side with you in faith for our faith.

That Christ may be glorified through our pain and our unity. See Paul tells us our suffering can be sanctified whatever it is.

That's what Christ's cross reminds us of. Our suffering can achieve for us an eternal glory that far outweighs all our troubles.

[12 : 36] I have a Mother's Day story to illustrate this point. There was a 16 year old Christian girl who found out nine months before Mother's Day that she was pregnant.

Despite tremendous pressure and persecution, the girl did not want to terminate her baby's life. She could not go through with an abortion.

She felt it was not an option for her. But she also knew that she was in no place to raise the child herself. Through an adoption agency, the young mother found a Christian couple who couldn't have children biologically.

And had already adopted another child four years earlier. So the 16 year old met them. She signed the papers. And she prepared for labor. And then immediately to give away her child.

She gave birth to a baby girl 35 years ago today. On Mother's Day weekend. And this is what she writes. My doctor was amazing.

[13 : 44] Kind. Loving. And had an adopted son. He shares this with me while I was in labor. Telling me how brave I was.

The Lord put so many people in my life to help me through this gut-wrenching time. I had a Christian nurse who was so kind and caring. Time came to leave the hospital.

And it was so painful. I felt like someone kicked in the stomach. And that I was the worst mother in all the world who was leaving their precious child behind. I mean, who can look after your baby better than you can?

The mother. I cried for days on end. And Iris, my social worker, visited me daily. Talking for hours. The 12th day would arrive.

And this was the grace period. Where I was allowed to have my baby returned. If I wanted. I called Iris. And I said, I can't do this. I need her back.

[14 : 43] The pain is too great to bear. She came and we talked. And prayed. And prayed. There was a calm that came over me.

And she talked about the adoptive mom and dad. And what she knew about them. And how they're wonderful people. Who have waited for this day. I knew in my heart. That is where the Lord wanted my baby to be.

And that my road ahead was not going to be easy. But that I would do it. Because that's how much Christ loved us. And how much I loved my child. I struggled so badly.

For the first five years. As time went on. The tears would stop. But the heartache didn't. 30 years passed.

And then. This woman received a Facebook message. From an unknown but familiar face. It said. 30 years ago. You made an incredibly.

[15 : 45] But difficult. But selfless decision. To adopt out your baby girl. And as a result. I'm here today. I want you to know. How thankful I am.

For the decision you made. And how fortunate I was. To grow up in the home. You selected for me. If it weren't for your selfless sacrifice. I would not have been given the blessing.

That is life. Nor have been able to grow into the woman and mother. That I am. Today. That Facebook message. Was written by my wife.

She's the baby in the story. And today's her 35th birthday. Melissa's note. Was met by a response from the birth mother. Which said. I cannot tell you.

How long I have prayed. And dreamed. Of this day. God is so good. And because of his love. Support. And the power of the Holy Spirit.

[16 : 45] I was able to give you the gift. Of life. Unity in suffering. Produces spiritual stamina. A Christian social worker.

An encouraging doctor. A godly nurse. Striving side by side. With one mind. And one spirit. Walking with a 16 year old mother. Through unimaginable pain. For Christ's glory.

And for the better life. For their child. Now this story of suffering. Has a happy ending. Our stories often don't. We often don't know why we suffer.

Or how our suffering. Serves God's will. Few of us are going to get. A Facebook message. That will adequately sanctify. Our suffering. Or vindicate. Our pain.

But here. Paul teaches. That our suffering. Whatever it may be. Has been sanctified. If we are in Christ. Paul shows us.

[17 : 47] How to see our suffering. As a grace. Granted to you. By God. For the sake of Christ. Your suffering. Can be used. To make you like Christ.

Your suffering. Can be endured. For the sake of another. To bless another. Through your pain. Suffering. Can sanctify you. And lead to God's glory.

It can be used by God. To create. Community. No one should have to suffer alone. You. Do not have to suffer.

Alone. But be brave. Reach out. We are here. I pray tonight. That you will find a friend. Or better. A family. Here. Who will suffer with you. Striving side by side. To keep the faith. Faith. So far. Paul has outlined.

[18 : 43] The one danger. The Philippians must be aware of. It's a danger of disunity. And isolation. Amidst suffering. He tells them. The importance to be one.

To be united. To be in one spirit. One mind. Striving side by side. For the faith of the gospel. He's spoken about suffering. Which he sees the Philippians are experiencing. And he tells them.

That suffering has been granted. By God. For Christ's sake. And that suffering can be a grace.

Granted to us. In order to unite us. In Christ. For his glory. And now Paul tells us.

How this unity. Forged through the fires of suffering. Can be attained. In chapter two. He writes. If there's any encouragement.

In Christ. If there's any comfort. From love. If you have any participation. In the Holy Spirit. Any affection. And sympathy. Then complete my joy.

[19 : 42] By being of the same mind. Having the same love. Being in full accord. And of one mind. It's the same thing.

He's been saying in chapter one. He's appealing to unity. In mind and love. In light of the gospel. And now. Finally. He tells us. How do we do this? If you're a practical person.

How do I do this? Here's how you do it. He writes. Do nothing from rivalry. Or conceit. But in humility. Count others more significant. Than yourselves.

Each of you. Not look. To your own interests only. But also to the interests. Of others. That's it. That's the secret.

The key to unity in Christ. Amid suffering. Is humility. The key to a united community. Of Christians. Is a community.

[20 : 38] Where all of us. Are looking. Not to our own interests. But to the interests of others. It's a willful. Intentional. Posture. Of servant. Heartedness.

It was the posture. Of Melissa's biological mother. And her Christian community. Around her. Prayerfully. Considering the interests. Of her baby. Above her own. And that's how Christian unity grows.

We grow in unity. As we grow in humility. And we grow in humility. When we grow. In Christ. The motivation for our unity.

Amid suffering. And our humility. Toward each other. Is Jesus' love. For us. That's what next week's passage. Is all about. Jesus was in the form of God.

We're told he's God's own son. And yet he decided to take the form of a servant. He united himself to us. By being born in human form.

[21 : 39] And then humbling himself. By submitting to the ultimate suffering. Death. Excruciatingly delivered. On a Roman cross. See Jesus humbled himself.

For us. Jesus united himself to us. Through suffering. Jesus. Through his humility. Considered our interests above his own.

He died the death we deserve. That we may share in the life he enjoys. Forever. With his father. And the Holy Spirit. So our focus as a family.

Is on Jesus. He is the gospel. He is God's good news. He is our Lord. He's our savior. And he's also our model. And our motivation.

In how we live. We live lives worthy of the gospel. By being united in Christ. Suffering for Christ.

[22 : 35] And being humble. Like Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.