

Only One Thing Matters

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

So I'm excited for us to dive back into Philippians 1. You can look with me in verse 27. The beginning of a new paragraph there.

The Apostle Paul writes, It says, And that from God.

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 you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. That is the Word of God. Exciting for us to be able to open it this morning. One commentator begins his book on Philippians by saying, I would like to buy three dollars worth of gospel, please.

[1 : 36] He continues, I would like, he continues, Just enough gospel to make my family secure, my children well behaved, but not so much that I find my ambitions redirected and my giving too greatly increase.

I would like about three dollars worth of gospel, please. Now, none of us would be so dumb to say something like that aloud, but nevertheless, I dare say all of us have thought it.

I've been tempted to say it. I would just like a bit of gospel. I just want to be happy. I just want a few good friends. I want my family to be grounded, to be well-rounded.

I want a church to attend whenever I want. But I don't want too much of this gospel. I still want to keep most of my time free to myself.

And I want to keep most of my money, or at least direct it how I would like. I want a few good friends, but I don't want my friendships to get messy, where the wrong people influence my kids, or where I have to forgive those who hurt me and have to love those unlike me.

[3 : 15] I don't want to give up some of the things I love. I just want a little bit of gospel because I don't want to give up those things. My time, my family time, my things.

I just want to keep my life mainly to myself. So I would like three dollars worth of gospel. The Apostle Paul, in this passage, tells us three dollars will not be enough.

To mature and endure, we need a lot more. After an update from prison, which we studied in the first 26 verses of this letter, Paul gets to the heart of what he wants to say.

He addresses the Philippians, and he tells them what they must do. In a word, he says, stick together, and hold fast to the main thing. Stick together, hold fast to the main thing.

Stick together, get low, stick together, and hold fast to the main thing. So we're going to break this out, like every good preacher, in three points.

[4 : 15] So the first one is live worthy of the gospel. Live worthy of the gospel. As I just said, Paul has been greeting in these first 26 verses.

And verse 27 begins the heart of the letter. It begins the body of the letter, right? Right? And as we learned in English back in the day. And so Paul actually just turns to what he wants to say to the Philippians.

And he begins by commanding them to live worthy of the gospel. These verses actually form the essence of the letter. And they introduce us to the core of the letter.

So let's look at verse 27. He says, Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel. The verse begins actually in the Greek decisively. Only worthy.

Only worthy. It's very clear. Only worthy. When Paul addresses the Philippians, he doesn't have a list of commands for them. He says, One thing. Only one thing counts.

[5 : 16] Only one thing about life actually matters. He said, Whether I come to you, only one thing. Whether I'm not able to come to you, I'm stuck in prison. Only one thing.

So what is this one thing, right? We've got to know this one thing. The gospel. Live worthy of the gospel. So he's saying, The gospel, as we know, is the good news that sinners can be made right with God through the death of Jesus Christ through no work of their own. That's the gospel. If it was news that we needed to do something to do something to be acceptable to God, it wouldn't be good news. But the gospel is good news because it declares that we can be accepted regardless of what we've done and regardless of what we're able to do. And so, to live worthy of the gospel does not mean we try hard to secure something we don't have. To live worthy of the gospel means we try harder to make what we do have shape all of our life. Does that make sense? To live worthy of the gospel means we're not trying to attain something per se that we don't have that's outside of our reach. Rather, to live worthy of the gospel means to take what we do have and to press it into our life in every area.

[6 : 29] So, to live worthy of the gospel doesn't mean we make ourselves worthy. It means that we make everything in our life line up to the gospel.

The gospel is not meant to be just believed. It's to be lived. It's to be worked out. It's not enough to believe the right thing is what Paul's saying. It must shape our lives. Whether I come to you or whether I'm not able to come to you this must shape your life. What he's saying is it's not enough to know the truth. You have to walk in it. So, this is similar to what Paul says in other verses. He says, walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. You probably heard that phrase, right? Walk in a manner worthy of your calling is what he says in Ephesians 4. He says, in another place, as you've received Christ, walk in Him. But the word here is unique. So, he says, live worthy. But this word, live, is unique. It essentially means city life. It has the word city sandwiched with living.

[7 : 29] City, living, our life as citizens. You know, Philippi, as I mentioned a couple weeks ago, is a Roman colony and being a Roman citizen was a big deal.

Remember the Apostle Paul? When he would be brought before different people, he would say, I'm a Roman citizen because that's a big deal. It announced to people, much like being a citizen of the United States, it's a big deal.

Well, he's telling them that you're more than a citizen of Rome. You're a citizen of heaven through the gospel. And this citizenship is to shape every area of your life far more than being a citizen of Rome. He's saying, your belief in the gospel can't just be spiritual. It's got to be physical. It's got to be daily. And it's got to get into the daily, ordinary places of our lives. You're believing the gospel. It can't be private. Sometimes our culture says, just keep your beliefs private. Well, that's not what Paul's saying. He's saying, it's got to go public. It's got to be political.

[8 : 32] Not talking about having a party that you're going for or something like that. It's got to be political in the sense that it shapes your life. Everything in our lives has to be consistent with the gospel. several months ago or, I don't know, half a year ago, I read about a story about Bob Dylan. I don't know if you guys are a music fan. I'm a huge music fan. Not the biggest fan of Dylan because he has a horrible voice. But that's another story. And when Obama was in office, Dylan was invited to the White House.

They had a big celebration for the Civil Rights Movement. So they had all these artists come in that were pivotal in the Civil Rights Movement because the Civil Rights Movement birthed a lot of great music.

Maybe it's some that you don't let your kids listen to, but that's between you and them and the Lord. But Joan Baez was there. John Mellencamp, Smokey Robinson, Natalie Cole, Yolanda Adams, and all the other artists, they came in and they did much like you would do if you went to the President's house.

You would toe the line, right? You know, they came in early. They did sound check. They practiced. They jumped at the chance to take a picture with the Obamas, but not Dylan.

[9 : 50] If you know anything about Dylan, this is not surprising. He's been a nonconformist the whole way, so he didn't want anything to do with that hoopla. He just walked in, played the times they were a changing, and left.

Obama later commented, and these are just fabulous comments. He said he wouldn't come to the rehearsal. Usually all these guys are practicing before the set in the evening. He didn't want to take

a picture with me.

Usually all the talent is dying to take a picture with me and Michelle before the show, but he didn't show up like that. He came in, played the times they were a changing. He finishes the song, steps off the stage.

I'm sitting in the front row, comes up, shakes my hand, sort of tips his head, gives me a little grin, and then leaves. And that was it. He left.

Bob Dylan left. That was our only interaction with him, and I thought, that's exactly how I want Bob Dylan. Right? You don't want Bob Dylan cheesing and grinning with you.

[10:51] You want him to be a little skeptical about the whole enterprise. Do you see? That's how we want Bob Dylan. If he starts cheesing too much and Instagramming too much, we're going to be skeptical of him.

We want him skeptical of the president and the whole government. And God wants our lives consistent in the same way. Not skeptical of the government or something like that, but consistently aligned with the gospel.

Predictable. Reliable. John Piper has said, famously said, you don't have to know a lot of things for your life to make a lasting difference in the world. The people that make a durable distance in the world are not the people who have mastered many things, but have been mastered by one great thing.

If you want your life to count, you don't have to have a high IQ. You don't have to have good looks, thank the Lord, riches, or come from a fine family or a fine school.

Instead, you have to know a few great, majestic, unchanging, obvious, simple, glorious, or one great, all-embracing thing and be set on fire by them.

[11:59] What Piper is saying is exactly what Paul says. Our lives must align with one thing, that one thing is the gospel. The only hope for sinners to be made right with a holy God and the only news that must go out to the end of the earth.

The gospel is the one thing we must know and must be on fire about and all of our lives must fall in line with it. It means that in and through every area of our lives we're seeking to draw attention to Christ.

It means that in and through all we do our greatest excitement is reserved for the gospel. Now that doesn't mean we just only do one thing. Like we, you know, it wouldn't please the Lord if we just only read about the gospel all day long.

Like the Lord cares about our work, He cares about our relationships, He cares about our children, He cares about all these other things and so we have to devote ourselves to those things but what He's saying is that those things must be driven by this passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so I must ask, is the gospel the main thing in your life? Is it what you're most excited about? Are you more excited about anything else?

[13:14] What would your friends say? What would your children say? Children are incredible on a number of different fronts but our children, we can teach them whatever we want but they will mainly be shaped by what we're excited about.

We can say to them, we can give them so many instructions, we can talk till our mouth, our throat goes hoarse but they will mainly be shaped, they will mainly catch, they will mainly be swayed by what we're excited about.

And so what do they see? Do they see that our main excitement is the gospel of Jesus Christ or do they see something else? Is our excitement on Saturday different than our excitement on Sunday morning? John Piper again says, the greatest stumbling block for a child in worship is a parent who doesn't.

Now that's convicting. You know, the greatest stumbling block for a child in worship is a parent who doesn't. We want to, if we want to pass on this, we want to be only about one thing, it must be driving our excitement and our passion.

More is caught than taught by our lives. So what are people catching? Oh man, it's convicting. Think about it. What are people catching from your life, my life?

[14:45] Second, so live worthy of the gospel. Second, stand together in the gospel. Stand together in the gospel. Our text opened with that command as we studied but now Paul moves on to show us the effect.

Look in verse 27. Only let you men of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that, so that whether I come to you, I may hear that you're standing firm in one spirit with one mind.

Only live worthy of the gospel so that you stand together. Paul continues, tells us that we just stand together single-minded in the gospel without fear.

Stand together. Look in there. In verse, well I guess the end of verse 27 with one, or in one spirit with one mind.

In one spirit with one mind. These are little words that unpack or underline a massive reality. The Christian life is not a solo mission. You can't go it alone. It's a community project in which we stand with one another and we stand together.

[15 : 57] We stand united. One spirit. Now the emphasis is clear. One mind. There's unity of spirit and of mind. We stand together single-minded also in the gospel.

So what's that mean? One spirit, one mind. Does that mean like all our heart and all our mind? No, the idea there is that we stand together with a common purpose, a common attitude.

We stand together single-mindedly because there's only one thing that unites us and one thing that we care about. We stand together single-mindedly in the gospel.

We're comrades. He continues striving side by side. This idea that we're fighting together, we're beside one another and we're fighting for the truth of the gospel.

We're comrades. We're teammates. Now I hate Alabama. But I am a fan of one player after last night and that's Jalen Hurts because this kid understood something about himself last year when he was benched in that national championship game and that was that he was a part of a team.

[17 : 19] And so the rematch happened last night and I guess midway through the third quarter Gertua, and I'm not going to pronounce his last name, goes out and Jalen, I guess it's midway through the fourth quarter actually, and Jalen comes in.

So this is a guy, top prospect when he came into college, could have very easily transferred, could have very easily sulked, could have very easily eaten Twinkies and gotten fat and gotten slow, but here he was ready to be the next man up and into that game and obviously he led him to the win which I was cheering against, but that's another story, but I became a fan of him and actually even Saban looked like a human being after the game when he teared up talking about Jalen and how he stuck with it.

Well, that's what it is in the church of Jesus Christ. It's a team in which we care less about ourselves and more about the whole. We have one mind and one heart, one purpose and one commitment.

We're not just a community for community's sake. We're not just here for barbecues and cookouts or something like that for the social benefit. We're here because we have a cause. We're here because we rallied around Jesus Christ.

Recently, in bigger cities, there's been the rise of these so-called godless churches. In fact, the creed of the humanist community in Boston is I believe in community.

[18 : 49] They gather together. They hold Sunday services. Wouldn't you like to be a fly on the wall for that? They appear on the outside like churches but they're trying to do community apart from Christ.

Now, if we're honest, we'll probably say that's just like those ridiculous things northerners do. But I dare say, that was a joke.

If you're from the north, you know, let's talk after the meeting. I dare say we can be the same way. Church of Jesus Christ can more quickly rally around little things like a particular party or a particular candidate, like a way of doing church or a way of doing school, like a particular way of viewing the world, these things that I will do, these things that I won't do, a particular way of viewing their influence, a particular way of viewing liberties or something like that but there's ultimately only one thing that we're supposed to gather around.

There's ultimately only one thing we're supposed to be single-minded about and that's the gospel. That's what Paul's saying. We need one another because we need help stay in focus on this one thing.

We need one another so that we have help when our mind is diverted from this one thing so that little things don't slip in and divide us. Churches do not fold over big things.

[20 : 12] They fold over little things that grow and wedge apart a church. We need one another to stay focused on the one message that we have to offer to the lost.

This quote from Adolph Safer really affected me this week. He says, the union of Christians is marred by not keeping sufficiently prominent the great things.

The union of Christians is marred by not keeping sufficiently prominent the great things. Did it ever strike you that the early Christians also differed on minor points? But they were so absorbed in thinking they knew God as Father and that Jesus was their Savior and that they were possessors of the Holy Spirit that nothing could separate them.

Thus it is that when we go to a meeting where Christians gather as Christians united around one thing, we feel as if we've lost our asthma.

We can breathe. We stand together single-mindedly about the gospel and when we gather we can breathe.

[21 : 24] Yeah, it felt like that when you've gone into the assembly that finally you can breathe. You go through the week losing your breath but when we gather we lose our asthma, not our breath. we remember the gospel.

I love that image. What's your view of church? A routine? A nice weekend option? Or is it oxygen? Is it life? Allowing you to breathe in these truths again.

The old writers used to say that the distance between heaven and earth narrowed on Sunday's morning. It was almost as if heaven and earth kissed. When the assembly gathered together there was this dynamic thing that happened that they could breathe in and breathe out the truths of the gospel in such a way that they believed it with all their heart.

Because throughout the week our hearts are just like these leaky vessels. We can pour in all this gospel we want on Sunday morning but throughout the week it just seems to drip completely out. And so that's what we offer. This is all we offer to you as a church. An opportunity and a place to slow down and breathe in the gospel. It's the greatest news. It's the only news that will change your life.

[22 : 39] And you don't have to have a high IQ to get it. You don't have to have good looks to get it. You don't have to come from a good family to get it. You don't have to have things in order to get it. In fact you may have been stumbling all the way into this meeting and we offer you I offer you the gospel of Jesus Christ that you would come in that you would see that you have a issue you have a problem you've sinned against the holy God but the greatest news on the planet is that holy God has come after you.

And he said all you need to do is give me your sin and run to me for rescue and you'll be freed. Because Christ died on the cross for our sins so that in him we might become the righteousness of God so that in him we might be forgiven and counted right with him.

I pray this is a place where we can pause the hustle and breathe the gospel. You know we stand together he continues without single minded without fear.

If we're standing the assumption is I think there that we're standing against something. We're not sitting right? You stand because you're not at rest. So how are we going to face what we're standing against?

[24 : 03] That's what he continues with. How are we going to face our opponents? Theologian Mike Tyson says everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth. So what's our plan for when we get punched when punches are thrown?

He continues in verse 28a look with me there. He says standing side by side in the faith 28a and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

Not frightened in anything by your opponents. Not fearful of nothing is what it says. Not fearful of anything. Now it's unclear who these opponents were that they're talking about.

It's obvious to the Philippians but not so obvious to us. But it seems clear that their opponents are obviously real and that they threaten real physical persecution. And Paul tells them to stand without fear.

Now you may say okay that's too much. I can stand in the gospel with the help of other people but I can't do without fear. And there's incredible truths packed into the rest of this verse that I have for you or that God has for you.

[25 : 09] He says 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. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction and your salvation and that from God.

The idea is that their opposition brings about two things. It brings about their destruction and it signals your salvation. Now you think what is encouraging about that?

Well let me tell you what he means that if they're opposing us for the sake of Christ it means they don't belong to him. But it's also true it means that if they are opposing us for the sake of Christ it means we do.

So oddly enough that's the way he's encouraging them. If they're opposing us for the sake of Christ it means they don't belong to him but if they're opposing us for the sake of Christ it means we do.

The opposition doesn't reveal that we're walking in the wrong direction it actually reveals we're walking in the right direction.

All you have to do is follow Christ for a few hours and you'll begin to see this opposition. not in physical threat most of us but in the selfishness and sin of our hearts in the distraction of this world in the lies of the enemy and so for the Christian most of life is uphill and if you're struggling I got news for you.

[26 : 30] If you feel like the wind is at your face I got news for you. You're headed in the right direction. Things are going well. If there was no fight it's because you're dead. is what he's saying.

If there's no battle it means the battle's lost. The promise is not that we're in this war that may or may not turn out for good for us.

The promise is that this war this battle that we feel is leading to our salvation our final deliverance before God through Christ. So stick together in the gospel.

Stick together. Hold fast to the main thing. Point three suffer for the gospel. We're to live worthy of the gospel. We're standing united in the gospel. We do these things because we must suffer for it. Look in verse 29. He says for it has been granted to you for the sake of Christ that you should not only believe but also suffer for his sake. Remember I was talking about that word for so those are important words.

[27 : 36] They point to the reason the basis of different things. So the reason standing firm in the gospel against opposition is not a surprise to us is because it leads to our salvation because we're called to suffer.

So he says it has been granted. Now that's an important word. It's not mere permission or approval. It has been granted points to purposeful planning and to the free gift of God.

You see? See? This word is used also in Romans 8.32. It says he who did not spare his own son gave him up for us all so that also with him he might give us all things.

In other places they say we must understand the things freely given by God. Do you see what's going on? It's this granted. It's not this permission. It's this purposeful planning and the free gracious gift of God.

So what's he talking about? What is granted to us? I mean this is going to be great. What's the present waiting on the other side of the door?

[28 : 44] What's been granted to us? And he continues it's been granted to you verse 29 that you should not only believe but also suffer for his sake. Suffering therefore is not accidental nor merely permitted by God.

It is the purposefully planned and gracious gift of God. Nothing happens by surprise to him and nothing hazard happens to us.

Now you may say what a bad gift. I agree. What a terrible gift. What do you mean it's been granted to me to suffer?

What are you talking about Lord? Or maybe you say it's just a cruel gift. I have a hard enough time understanding how a good God could allow suffering but now you're saying that it's purposefully planned by God in my life.

How could you say that? That all my loneliness all my marital heartache all the death I've walked through all the disappointment all the failures are a result of his purposeful planning?

[30 : 14] What are you talking about? Why would God do that? Now the rest of that conversation may be better over a cup of coffee than what we got right now but there's so many ways the scriptures answer that question.

It says God's working for our good. It says suffering comes and it assails us and it takes us out but God's working and he's plotting for our good. They say that God's trying to make us more like Christ.

It talks about the purification. It burns off the chaff. It burns off the things. It purifies us. Suffering does. But here Paul focuses on one reason that God grants us to suffer.

He says twice. He says for the sake of Christ. For the sake of Christ. On behalf of Christ.

For Christ. He says we suffer later on he says we suffer and we share Christ's sufferings. Now it's no surprise that Paul tells us following Christ means we suffer.

[31 : 26] I just said that just covered that. Jesus was certain he was called to suffer and was certain everybody who followed him was called to suffer. He says a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me so they will persecute you.

But it is surprising that he says we're called to share Christ's suffer. We're called to suffer for Christ's sake. There's something in Christ and the way he's designed the world that suffering is a part of it for his glory and for his sake.

That is surprising. In one sense Christ's suffering is completely unique and finished.

His death and resurrection in our place secure forgiveness and new life for us once for all. He needs no help. Jesus is not hanging on the cross saying I need your help.

He's saying I'm hanging on the cross it is finished. But in another sense his suffering is incomplete. How can that be?

[32 : 28] Colossians 1 says our suffering fills up what is lacking in Christ's suffering. So he says in one sense Christ's suffering is incomplete. There's holes in it.

The idea is that as we continue to follow Christ as we continue to spread the gospel and build the church as we press on in faithfulness we suffer and therefore share Christ's sufferings. We follow him and we suffer.

We're associated with him and we suffer. We obey him and we suffer. And the idea is this is not just the suffering of those who are being persecuted in hostile countries like China or Syria or Iraq.

This is the suffering of moms striving to pour out their lives. Trying to live not for themselves but for him who died for them. This is the suffering of lonely singles choosing holiness over easy intimacy.

This is the suffering of students embracing the little trials of homework and projects as preparing them to persevere when the costs get a lot higher. That's all school is.

[33 : 32] It's training us to persevere to the higher cost. This is the suffering of men who refuse to run from responsibility but take it on so they can care for their family.

They can lead them and all the self denial that comes with it. Do you see what's going on here? The gospel does not just advance to a suffering servant or to a suffering savior.

It advances to a the only reason we have something to offer to this world is because we know their pain and yet we know the truth of who God is in Christ.

So it marches forward year after year or really week after week through a people acquainted with grief weakness and struggle those who hold out to the world the only hope and comfort found anywhere that's found only in Christ.

So don't think it's strange when trials come upon you. Don't be surprised. Don't try to avoid them. Do they not come upon your master?

[34 : 42] How will they not also come upon you? But we're not alone. We share Christ's sufferings and so we have fellowship with him.

There's a participation there. But we also suffer together as a people. Sadly suffering often drives us away from the people we love.

Too often hard things isolate us. They lead us to withdraw from others. They lead us to be fearful to be honest. Fearful to laugh. Fearful to hope again.

But it doesn't have to. There's just two little words that are wonderful in verse 30. He said suffering for his sake engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Engaged in the same conflict. What you're walking through in Philippi is the same conflict I've had. It's the same conflict I now have.

[35 : 49] I'm right there with you. How many times have been strengthened by knowing that someone is right there with us. Someone has that same conflict. That's what we can offer one another this morning is that my suffering may not be the same as yours.

My struggles may not be the same as yours. I'm nevertheless engaged in the same conflict. The conflict of trying to follow Christ. And so the Lord loves to bring his people together in suffering.

He may not ease the pain. He may not bring a friend in our time of need. And this is the wisdom he has displayed in the church.

The church is the most wonderful place on earth. It's way more of a hospital than a country globe. Because it's a place where people aren't putting their best face forward and trying to live their best life now.

But a place where people are honest and find true help through the help of others. It's a place where we rejoice with those who rejoice.

[36 : 54] Thank God it's a place we also weep with those who weep. A place where we share the same comfort we receive. I've seen it happen time and time again.

Where folks walk through unimaginable suffering only with the help of Jesus Christ, but also with the visible, real help of others.

through betrayal, through adultery, the death of a child, death of a spouse, through job loss after job loss. These relationships help us breathe in and breathe out and remind us to hold fast to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So will our suffering drive us inward and leave us alone? will it call us outward into dependence upon one another?

See how these words are just critical. We'd live only for the gospel. We'd stand together in the gospel. We'd suffer for the gospel. The gospel is not a slogan. It's not just something we place over things.

[38 : 08] The gospel is the core of what we believe. And all of our life, we're trying to align to it. so that we might follow Jesus Christ, that we might love him, and that we might know him more truly through our relationship with him.

So let's stick together and hold fast to the gospel. It's the only hope we have. And thank God it's the only hope we need. Let us pray. Father in heaven, thank you for these words, and thank you for this moment.

God, I pray that anything that was unhelpful would be forgotten, and anything that was helpful would be remembered. It would shape us more and more to trust you and to follow you in faith.

Lord, I do pray for this community that you would knit us together, knit our hearts together as Paul prayed in Colossians 2, that we would be knit together and united around the gospel, holding fast to the main thing.

We pray for these things. We thank you for these things. In Jesus' name, Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

[39 : 33] For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.