

# Joy in Living

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Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, we've all heard the phrase, I'm sure when the cats are away, the mice will play.! It's just a simple proverb, meaning that people will behave however they like when a person of authority is absent.

! Where the cat is the figure of authority and the mice are those who will enjoy freedom when the cat is not there. And so the boss is out of the office. Well, what do the workers do?

They are tempted possibly to slack or even to misbehave. When the teacher is out of the classroom, what do the pupils do? Well, they stop their work, they get their phones out, and they mess about.

And so as we continue our series in Paul's letter to the Philippians, we've already heard how Paul wrote to the Philippians from prison. He was in prison as he wrote this letter to them.

And now we hear Paul urging them to live consistent lives as Christians. He says in verse 27, And so he has been speaking about the gospel of Christ so far, and now he continues to speak about the gospel of Christ.

[ 1 : 1 3 ] But his focus, you'll notice, shifts away from himself and his circumstances, and the focus shifts onto the Philippians and their circumstances. Because this letter, Philippians, it basically highlights division on the inside in the church in Philippi.

And so the Christians there need to be united. But the letter also highlights opposition from the outside. And so the Christians in Philippi need to stand firm.

And so they faced churches that every church faces, including Christ Church Glasgow and including Merchant City Church, which was launched this morning, and it was great for us to be there.

And so Paul is saying here, For whatever happens, and for us, whatever happens, whether back then in Philippi or now in Glasgow, Paul's exhortation here, or Paul's encouragement here, is that we should conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

That's the principle he sets out there. Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. And I suggest that that is a key verse in Philippians.

[ 2 : 2 7 ] It's if not the underlying message of the whole letter. It was the application for the Philippians in those early days of Christianity, but it's also the application for you and me, if we call ourselves Christians.

It is that we must live a consistent Christian lifestyle, whatever is happening, whatever is happening around about us, and whatever is happening in the world.

Whether people are with us or not, whether people see us or not, we're to live a consistent Christian life. And so I'd like us to look at our text under three headings this afternoon.

And they all start with P. First, the principle. Second, the practice. And third, the power. So first of all, the principle. The principle is there, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel.

See that in verse 27? Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. And so Paul is saying to the Philippians, whatever else is happening, whatever is going on inside the church or outside the church, I want you to do this one thing.

[ 3 : 3 6 ] Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. But what does that mean? Well, Paul's not suggesting here that we can somehow make ourselves worthy of God's favor.

No, this is about our behavior, our lifestyle, how we live, the things we do, the things we say.

Because our lives, Paul is saying, must be consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We should be living examples of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because what Paul does here is he uses the language of citizenship.

It's there in verse 27. Because when it says there, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy, it literally is saying, behave as citizens worthy.

In other words, be a worthy citizen. Now, citizenship was a big deal in Philippi. Philippi, if you didn't know, was a Roman colony. And so the citizens of Philippi were citizens of Rome.

[ 4 : 37 ] And Rome was the great city. Just like Glasgow is the great city today. So Rome, if you were a citizen of Rome, you had special rights, special privileges, a special status.

It was a great position to be in. If you lived in the great city of Rome itself. Now, being a citizen continues to be a big deal today, doesn't it?

And I think we've seen this in the UK over the past couple of weeks with flags going up all over the place. St. George's flags in England, Saltair flags in Scotland, Union Jacks, all around the place.

And whether you see flags going up as a good thing or as a bad thing, the point is they say to us that citizenship matters. It's an important thing.

Being a citizenship is significant. Citizenship does actually mean something. Our people wouldn't bother about flags flying. But citizenship means something.

[ 5 : 41 ] Because we know that being a citizen of a place gives you certain rights and it gives you certain privileges. But here's the thing. It doesn't just give you rights and privileges. Being a citizen also demands a certain lifestyle and it demands certain behavior.

And so what Paul is doing here, he's picking up on citizenship of the great city of Rome for those in Philippi. And he's using it as an illustration.

He's not concerned so much about their Roman citizenship, but he uses this citizenship language to talk about a different kind of citizenship. Later on, in Philippians 3, verse 20, Paul says this, Our citizenship is in heaven.

Because every believer, every Christian is a citizen of heaven here on this earth. And so his message to the Philippian Christians is to live in the earthly city of Philippi as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God.

Live your heavenly citizenship here in this world. And that's the calling of every single Christian believer. To have a certain lifestyle, to behave in a certain way, to be a worthy citizen of heaven on earth.

[ 7 : 09 ] Which means there's a sense in which a Christian will live a life that is different from everybody else around them. Because a Christian doesn't actually belong here in this world.

We are resident aliens. Because we belong to heaven. So what we say, how we say it, what we do, how we do it, should be distinctively different.

Even better. We should be easily recognizable because our speech and our behavior should be a better quality. So our lives shouldn't simply look like the citizens of this world alone.

They should have this heavenly flavor to them. Because we belong to a heavenly people. We're from a different place. And so Paul is saying your lifestyle should be consistent with the gospel of Christ.

Where your character, where your attitudes, where your thinking, your living, your speaking is shaped by this gospel of Christ.

[ 8 : 16 ] That's what he's saying to the Philippians. In other words, you could say that we, you, me, we should have a lifestyle. Christ Church Glasgow, the Merchant City Church.

A lifestyle that increasingly looks like Christ. Being Christ-like is what Paul is urging the Philippians and us to hear.

And if we are Christ-like, there's a sense in which the governments across the world should realize that Christian citizens are actually their best citizens.

That it is good to have Christians around in society, in work, in school, because they should be a good influence.

Their lifestyle should be like Christ. So we should be the best citizens possible. Of course, here in Glasgow, but not just in Glasgow. Because if we are in Christ, then you and I must be the best citizens in our street, or in our workplace, or in our school, or with our sports team, or amongst our friends.

[ 9 : 23 ] Even around people who oppose us. We should be a good citizen of heaven. And so Paul's update on his own circumstances.

Chapter 1, verse 12 to 26. He's in chains, remember. Paul is exemplifying through his update how to conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel.

He says, whatever happens, for Paul, he's in prison. But still, he's Christ-like in chains. And so Paul gives this principle.

He's urging the Philippians to adopt this kind of lifestyle of conducting yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel. So that's his exhortation. That's his encouragement to the Philippian Christians.

And now he fleshes out what this looks like in practice in these verses. So the practice, moving from the principle to the practice. The practice, three things.

[10:19] Stand firm, strive together, and suffer well. So first, stand firm for the gospel. Look what he says there, verse 27. Then, whatever, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one spirit.

He wants them to stand firm. He's saying, just keep standing. No matter what else is happening around about you. No matter how hard it is, no matter what trials you face or challenges or difficulties, keep standing.

Don't give in. Don't give up. Keep standing. Stand firm in one spirit. Because essentially, we're only able to stand with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Because the Spirit helps us live a life that is worthy of the gospel. He's the one who enables us to be distinctive, to be Christ-like.

Because the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. And if the Spirit of Christ is in us, then he will make us into Christ-like people in this world. Heavenly people here on earth.

[11:37] Being like Jesus. And of course, standing firm is never, ever easy. But it's vital. And we know it's vital because the language that Paul uses here has got military overtones to it.

So he's using this illustration of soldiers who are standing firm as they face their enemy. And so he's saying to the Philippians, stand firm for the gospel.

Don't give ground. Don't give up. But as you seek to live the gospel out, just keep on going. Keep standing.

Because when we read the context here around this verse, verse 27, we get an idea of the circumstances that the Philippians found themselves in. They were frightened, or at least they were tempted to be.

Verse 28. Again, verse 28. They had opposition. Then verse 29. They were suffering. Verse 30. They had struggles.

[12:37] And you know, if you follow Jesus for any length of time, that you'll have all of those things. Fear, opposition, suffering, struggles. We find the same if we follow Jesus.

And so Paul's saying, stand firm. Stand firm. And standing firm is not something that we do on our own. It's what we do together with the Spirit's help, with God's people.

He's saying stand firm together, united for the sake of the gospel. Because it's through the gospel of Christ that we've been transformed and we continue becoming more like Jesus.

Which means, whilst we still continue to sin, we all do, we won't want to sin. But we'll want to battle and fight against it.

And so standing firm means we're not going to give ground to sin or give in to sin or be defeated by sin. But we'll seek to resist sin in our lives.

[13:41] That's how we're conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. So that's the first thing under the practice. It's standing firm. The second is striving together. Look at verse 27 and 28.

Again, he says, So not only do they and we need to stand firm, but we also need to strive together as one for the faith of the gospel.

And again, there's a unity, there's a togetherness in this, which is picked up in Paul's repetition of the word one. And so the Philippians were to strive together to contend for the gospel.

And if his language before had military overtones, here his language has got athletic overtones. It's gladiatorial language, which was common to the people he's writing to.

And so this striving or this contending is a better translation. It speaks both of defending, standing firm, defending, but also of attacking.

[15:02] Because the gospel of Jesus Christ then as now is under attack, isn't it? As the content of the gospel, the saving message of Jesus is rejected or opposed or mocked.

And so the gospel needs to be defended in the face of the opposition. But not just defended, we also need to be on the attack, proactively proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to people.

And that's the mission of the church. Not that we are drawn into the church and become Christians and are safe and secure and do nothing. But we're drawn into the church that we might be sent out into the world to proclaim this message.

which transforms lives and turns them the right way up. And so Paul's expecting the Philippians to seek the gospel spread and growth just like he did.

So there's a sense in which he's saying to everybody in the church in Philippi that they should strive together, shoulder to shoulder, side by side, giving their all with that kind of athletic determination for the faith of the gospel to expand and spread.

[16:24] That's why Paul says, I think, without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. It's no wonder he's using athletic language here. Because you never get anywhere without some kind of stress or opposition to push you forward.

But he's saying here that being a Christian isn't easy. And so this striving he speaks about does require resolve and strength and determination.

It does require us to be active. And so Paul doesn't want the Philippians just to crumble under the pressure. Because there's always going to be opposition to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And Jesus himself was clear about this, wasn't he? Opposition will come when you or our church believe and live and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our culture will always oppose what we believe. The gospel is always counter-cultural. And so no matter how gracious or kind or loving or smiley we are as Christians, and no matter how much good we seek to do, people will still oppose us.

[17:43] So Paul is saying, stand firm, but also strive together as one. Now perhaps the Philippians were frightened of those who opposed them.

But Paul says you don't need to be. Well, why? Because he says the opposition was a sign to their opponents. Paul says this is a sign to them that they will be destroyed.

And those are sobering words, aren't they? Destruction. But the fact that Christians continue to stand firm in the face of opposition and strive together and keep going says to the opponents, Paul's saying, that they will be destroyed.

And so being a Christian, living a Christian lifestyle, facing opposition, confirms these contrasting destinies that the Bible speaks of.

The destinies of unbelievers and of believers. Paul's saying opponents of the gospel will face destruction. But see what he says? For those who believe the gospel, they will be saved.

[18:51] And so this is a means of encouraging the Philippians. They were facing opposition, but Paul's saying, see your opposition. It's a sign that God is going to save you, that you belong to him.

And it is normal. It isn't abnormal. And so in a sense, we too should be encouraged when we are opposed for believing in Jesus Christ.

Because it is a sure sign that we belong to him. In fact, Jesus even uses the opposition to build his church.

And that's what he was doing with Paul when Paul was in prison. Building his church. That's what he does today still, as he has always done throughout the centuries. When his church faces opposition, he builds his church.

He knows what he's doing. And that's why Paul's message here is never give up. Strive together for the gospel. That is how God advances his kingdom in this world.

[19:53] And so that's why we should never be frightened. And I guess there's a sense in which if we are far more concerned about our own safety or perhaps our own reputation rather than conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel, then it's more than likely that we are simply ashamed of the gospel.

And so that takes us to this third practice, which characterizes the Christian lifestyle. So stand firm for the gospel. Strive together for the gospel. And third, suffer well for the gospel.

If we're to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel, then we will suffer. That is the deal, according to Paul.

Let's read this, 29 and 30. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you're going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

What's Paul saying here? What does he mean? Well, granted means to give grace or to graciously give. And so he's saying that both their believing in Jesus Christ and their suffering for Jesus Christ,

both have been granted by God.

[ 21 : 17 ] They're both gifts from God. So believing in Jesus Christ is a gift from God. We know that. It's a great gift. But he's saying suffering for Christ is also a gift from God.

And we don't really get that. Believing in Christ, great gift. Suffering, we don't really see that as a gift, do we? How can that be a gift from God?

We never think of suffering in this way, do we? We don't want to receive suffering. We want to avoid suffering. And even when suffering comes for being a Christian, we don't look on it as a gracious gift to us from God, do we?

But Paul says suffering is as much a gift from God as believing is. And so when the Philippians were suffering for Christ, they were receiving God's gift.

That's why he says in verse 30, you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. They're suffering for the gospel like Paul.

[ 22 : 30 ] And Paul uses his own example to encourage the Philippians. Because just as God used Paul's sufferings to advance the gospel, we saw more of that last week, chapter 1, verse 12 to 26.

So the Philippians could be sure that God would use their suffering to advance the gospel. And so they're called to suffer just like Paul, and just like Jesus before them.

And so their suffering wasn't in vain because God was using it to do his work. Which is a good thing to remember, isn't it? When we face opposition, or when we endure suffering for being a Christian or a follower of Jesus.

We've got to brace ourselves for when it comes, standing firm. But we also need to embrace suffering. Not because we want it, not because we like it, but because God does use it.

It is part of his work in our lives, in accomplishing his purposes, in us, but also in his world. And so suffering for Jesus is never an accident.

[ 23 : 44 ] Nor is it something that God just tolerates, as if he can't do much about it. No, it's a gift from him. And God uses it to make us more like what he wants us to be, which is more like Jesus, more Christ-like.

And suffering is one of the instruments that God will use. And in God's providence, it does produce perseverance and character and hope.

And it's ultimately used for our good. And yet this perspective on suffering is one that is hard to take. It's hard to swallow. It's hard to believe, even as a Christian.

And for those who aren't Christians, this perspective on suffering is just inconceivable. Because it's saying that suffering is not just inevitable, but it's actually an indication of God's gracious dealings with us.

And Paul's already emphasized the key to help us grasp this remarkable truth. There in chapter 1, verse 21, when he says, For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

[ 25 : 03 ] Because if that's the reality, then even death, which is the ultimate suffering, Paul's saying it's gain. In life, suffering makes us more like Jesus.

But then in death, suffering takes us to be in the very presence of Jesus. And it's only when we grasp this perspective that we're able to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel.

Okay, so, well, how do we get the power to do this? So, he's given to the principle, there's a practice. What about the power to do this? Well, we get the power to live this way through the one who suffered and died for us, Jesus Christ.

And if we fail to grasp why Jesus had to suffer, and yet was willing to suffer, then we'll never see our suffering as achieving anything. And so, Paul's about to go on and tell the Philippians in chapter 2, verse 5 to 11, when you look down, he's about to tell them all about the suffering and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Where he says, Jesus did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing and humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

[ 26 : 23 ] So, Jesus suffered and died to take the punishment we deserve for our sins so that we could avoid the greater suffering of an eternity in hell separated from God.

Jesus saved us from that. And Paul says that Jesus rose to give us this hope of eternal life, and he's saying he is now exalted to the highest place.

And so, Jesus will return as judge, and when he does come as judge, he'll do away with all suffering once and for all. And so, it's only as you see Jesus on the cross doing this for you, but not just for you or for me, but for all creation, only when we see what Jesus has done will we be able to

embrace the suffering that God grants.

Because if our Lord Jesus, Lord, chose the path of suffering to save us and to renew and to restore this suffering world, then if we want to follow him, how can we then refuse to follow him along the path of suffering?

You see, the gospel of Jesus Christ is not just true. It doesn't just help us make best sense of pain and suffering in this world.

[ 27 : 50 ] No other worldview or perspective other than the Christian one helps make best sense of pain and suffering. But it's not just true.

It doesn't just help us make best sense of suffering, but it is also beautiful because our suffering takes us to our loving Savior who suffered and died for us so we could be his.

And only as we remember what Jesus has done for us can we, whatever happens, conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel by standing firm for the gospel, by striving together for the gospel, and suffering well for the gospel.

Amen. Let's pray.