

Worthy Life!

- Philippians 1:27-30
- Paul has just told the church at Philippi that he is coming to see them, and that should be cause for them to glory in Christ Jesus. Now, in a rare moment in this letter, there may be a bit of admonition. Paul says, “So, live worthy of the Gospel, whether I come to see you or not!” Maybe Paul had heard that there was some struggle in this area among the Philippians. OR maybe it’s there because that’s the struggle EACH of us shares. Right? Narrowing the distance, the gap, between what we know is the truth and how we live it out. The gap between talking like a follower of Jesus and living like one.
- Let’s look at this text under these three main points this morning: Live worthy, Stand firm, Know your sign.
- **Live worthy**
- Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. The word for “manner of life” is the root from which we get politics, which is not about parties and debate but is about citizenship. This is the only time Paul used the word in his letters, and it refers to how we conduct ourselves in the public square. Is that relevant today? Oh, yes! The secularists warn Christians to keep their faith to themselves, to make sure we don’t conduct ourselves like Christians in the public square! Paul’s admonition is, ‘make sure you do!’ He is reminding the Philippians that though they live in “Little Rome,” they must not forget who they are. Don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold, he say. Little Rome is not home. America is not home. The public square is where you go public with your faith, NOT where you hide it. In other words, if you are being asked if you believe that Muslims do not know God because they deny that Jesus is the Son of God, don’t go political. Go biblical. Tell the Senator asking the question that the One with whom he has an issue is not a human on a

witness stand, but Almighty God on His throne. God the Father who raised God the Son from the dead and God the Son who prayed, “This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Live that out loud at the public square!

- Live worthy: it means that we don’t confuse people by talking one way and living another. It also means we are to live in such a way as to make the gospel attractive. Remember when we studied Titus, Paul said to the young man, “Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works.” Paul also wrote to Titus about bondservants, saying they are to “be well pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering.” That sounds demeaning. But wait! It is so that they will “show all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.” To live in a manner worthy of the Gospel is to live in public and private in a way that adorns the gospel!
- Then Paul says, and don’t just live worthy in the gospel when I’m around. Live worthy when I am there and when I am not. Many of you know, like I do, what it’s like to leave your kids with a babysitter, only to come home and find her in tears. Or hiding from your kids under the bed. Because the kids did not behave in your absence the way they behave in your presence. It is the same in a classroom with a substitute teacher (we used to call them fresh bait when I was in high school). It can be the same way in some churches, where the pastor is gone for a few Sundays and nobody shows up. Doesn’t matter here; half the congregation can be gone on any given Sunday, whether I am here or not! Our faith and practice is not man-centered but Christ-centered, so we are called to live worthy of the gospel because it’s the right way to live, not because it is what is expected of us by the leader.
- **Stand Firm**

- Paul says, “I want to hear that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the sake of the gospel.” This is a great word picture of the church of Jesus Christ. First, we are to stand firm, to hold our ground. We don’t shrink back at the first sign of opposition; on the contrary, opposition reminds us whose side we are on! Jesus told us not to be surprised by this: “If the world hates you,” He said, “know that it has hated me before it hated you.” (John 15:18). Paul is concerned that the Philippians continue to stand. And that they stand together in one spirit. There are no people more unified than those who stand together in the Spirit of the living God. Paul wrote in Ephesians “There is one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father who is over all and through all and in all.” (Eph. 4). We will see this theme repeated in the letter, how essential unity is in the body. Not external unity engendered by denominations or by ecumenical councils. No, it comes about by the Spirit of God. That’s why when we meet someone in another state or another country who is a brother or sister in Christ, we wonder how we can feel such kinship with him so quickly: it is because the Spirit of God has made us One.
- Notice also that we are to fight together. Here’s an important principle: when we are standing firm in the Spirit, fighting the real enemy, we don’t have time to turn and fight with each other. Nor do we have the inclination to beat up on someone who is at our side for the same reason, for the sake of the gospel. Remember that old game called Red Rover? Do kids still play that, or has it gone the way of dodge-ball because it’s too rough, and kids are too fragile? Anyway, two sides of people stood on the playground, opposite one another, and linked arms. Then they would call out to the other side, Red Rover, Red Rover, send Billy on over! And Billy would run as fast as he could and try to break through between two people who had their arms linked. If he can’t break through, then he becomes part of that team. If he can break through, then he gets to take one of the two people he

broke through back to his team. This is a picture of the battle we are in, saints. We will have opponents our whole lives who will run at us with all their might, headstrong in their opinions that run counter to the truth of Scripture. We have to stand firm and catch them with our truth; we cannot give in or give over. We want them on our team so we must be strong in what we believe. We love people in the world best by calling them over, letting them take their best shot, and standing firm in what the Word teaches. Because we stand firm in one thing. We stand firm in the gospel. Not a political party. Not an environmental cause or concern. Not anything else under heaven. We stand firm for the sake of the gospel!

- We also, with one mind, with the same purpose, are striving side by side. I like that picture of us in the church. We stand side-by-side, arms linked in the faith, standing firm in one spirit on the truth, helping each other stand up and prevail. The picture Paul paints, again, is of a group, not a single individual. You can't be side-by-side by yourself. We don't run this race, or ride in this race, alone. This is illustrated by what happened at the Tour of Italy race in May: On Wednesday's stage five of the race, Slovenian rider Luka Pibernik was racing solo 50 meters ahead of the main pack when he approached the finish line, thinking he'd won. As he approached the finish line, he raced his hands in victory and coasted. But he miscalculated. He still had a lap to go in the stage. Instead of first, he finished 148th! We don't walk alone or ride alone or do anything alone: we are striving side by side for the sake of the gospel. Don't go it alone.
- We also stand firm without fear. Verse 28, "and not frightened in anything by your opponents." The word used there is actually a secular word that Paul only uses this once, and it referred to being startled like a horse. If you have been around horses at all, you know they can be skittish, and jumpy. They have to trust their master in order to be useful to him. In the same way, Christians need not fear their opponents because we know that

they are not ultimately opposed to us but to God. And as Paul said, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Don’t waste another day walking around in fear of people. It is perhaps one of the greatest limiters of the power of the gospel, which is the power of God to save! When will we ever learn that we have nothing to prove, nothing to lose, and nothing to fear?

- We also see in this text that our courage to stand up for the gospel sends a clear sign to our opponents.
- **Know your sign**
- Listen! Our confidence in the Gospel gives us courage to stand and takes away our fear, and disarms our opponents. Their only advantage is to be able to play on the fear of Christians who are wobbly in their confidence; when that is gone, it is a sign to them. Paul says it is a clear sign to them of their destruction but of your salvation. I apologize that Paul is not politically correct here: apparently he didn’t get the memo that people don’t believe in hell anymore; that’s so first century, and that everybody knows that love wins! No, the word Paul uses here means utter destruction, ruin, and death, not temporal but eternal. Contrary to popular belief, everyone will not go to heaven when they die. There’s a sign here that points one way for the believer and another way for the unbeliever.
- Paul wrote this to the church in Thessalonica: “This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in

his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.” - 2 Thess. 1:5-10

- This is a sign to them, Paul says. Many commentators believe that Paul was making a clear reference to the Philippians of something they would instantly recognize, from the days of the gladiatorial fights in the Roman coliseum. The gladiators fought each other with sword and spear to the point that one lay exhausted and defeated on his back with the victor standing over him in triumph, his sword on the neck of his opponent. The victor would look up at Caesar for a sign. If the defeated man had fought well and bravely, the emperor may give the thumbs up, which meant he should be allowed to live to fight another day. But if Caesar were displeased with the man, he would give the thumbs down, the sign that the sword must be used to do its final work. Victory for one, destruction for the other.
- CS Lewis said this: “No one goes to heaven deservedly, and no one goes to hell unwillingly.” Heaven is a place for sinners who trust in God for salvation; and hell is a place for sinners who choose not to trust in God. Who trusted in themselves for salvation.” Lewis also wrote, “In the end, there are only two kinds of people—those who say to God ‘thy will be done’ and those to whom God says in the end ‘thy will be done.’”
- Paul closes this word with great encouragement to us, a reminder that God has granted us two things: to believe in Christ and to suffer for His sake. Granted. If something is granted to us, it is a gift. We all see salvation as a gift. But do we see suffering as a gift? We should. We must. It is for the sake of Jesus. For the sake of the Gospel. Can I remind you to put the Gospel first? Invite suffering this week by telling someone the good news that Jesus can save them from the wrath to come.
- Live worthy. Stand firm. Know your sign. Suffer for His sake.