

House Church Message Notes May 3rd, 2020 – In Lockdown (8 Weeks in Philippians)

Week 3: Following Christ in Lockdown (Philippians 1:27-2:5)

- **Introduction: The Same Mindset as Christ**

- “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...” (*Phil. 2:3-5*)
 - Stop and think about those words. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit...in humility value others above yourselves...looking to the interests of others...” Isn’t it fair to say that almost *everything* about our modern lives in America sets us up to behave exactly *opposite* of that statement? This Gospel is *countercultural* without a doubt. When a community of people really *lives this*, it turns things upside down.
 - An organization called *Hofstede Insights* works with multinational corporations around the world to help them navigate the challenges of cultural differences within their organizations. They use data based on 30 years of research to compare different cultures based on 6 different dimensions about how various nations understand themselves and what they value. According to Hofstede Insights, the top three values of American culture within those six dimensions are 1) Individualism, 2) Indulgence, and 3) Competition and Achievement. Hear that again—our top American values are *Individualism, Indulgence, and Competition*.
 - Keep that in mind as you read Paul’s teachings in this week’s passage, Philippians 1:27-2:5. Let’s start to walk through this week’s passage together. What we’re about to read begins a powerful and remarkable exhortation to the Church that we’ll cover over the next few weeks. Open up your Bibles to Philippians 1:27 and follow along with me:

- **Philippians 1:27-30**

- V. 27 *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*
 - Almost everyone has a vision for how their life should go—whether we’re aware of it or not, we all have ideas, beliefs, and values that make up what we see as “the good life.” We all have some kind of target we’re aiming for, whether we know it or not and whether we succeed or not.
 - What’s clear already in this letter to the Philippians, and what you’ll see throughout the New Testament, is that the Gospel is not just about a set of beliefs, but a lifestyle. Christianity isn’t just having certain ideas; it’s a whole way of life shaped by patterning ourselves after Jesus Christ. What is your deepest aim in life? What is the target you’re chasing after, day by day? And where is Christ in all of that? The good work that God has started in us, which He is committed to completing, is that of aiming our entire lives towards Jesus Christ. And it is a journey, a process, and most importantly, a gift of grace from start to finish.
- V. 28-30 *Then, 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, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. 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 are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.*
 - “Stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel...” what a powerful statement. Think about your life in the local church today—can this be said of us? Oh Lord, let it be true for us, for Trinity Church.
 - The original word for “striving” here carries connotations of athletic events, as an athlete striving for the finish line, a team striving together as one for the prize.

- We need to stand firm and do this together, because there are those who oppose us, in overt ways and in more subtle ways: to live a Christian life in this world, no matter what time period or culture, is in a sense, to live *a life of resistance*. Living for the Gospel means we serve a different King and we live in a counter-culture. At some point, you have to come to terms with the fact that following Christ will make you different and weird in this world. Your lifestyle, your values, your beliefs will be lived out in an environment of opposition in some way.
- Now, let's not be mistaken: our calling is not to an abrasive, self-righteous spirit of condemnation, with fingers pointing at all the problems with the world. Sadly, that is what we all too often see. Research over the last 10 years about the public perception of Christians in America has found that the top ways people think of the church begin with the word "Anti"—we are "anti" this and "anti" that and "anti" them—we are sadly known more by what we're against than what we're for. In this context, people "conduct themselves" as "jerks for Jesus" and when they get backlash, call it persecution.
- No, our call in this world of opposition is to stand firm and unafraid, but living as *salt and light*—to be people who bring out the wonderful flavors and colors of God's goodness in a broken world. Still, the more truly we do this in a world that does not recognize Jesus as king, the more likely we are to experience opposition—Paul states, "it has been *granted* to you on behalf of Christ...to suffer for him..." In other words, if you're facing opposition, in the grand scheme of God's Kingdom it's a privilege to serve the cause of Christ in this way and it's a mark of the genuineness of your faith. Jesus himself said as much in His beatitudes. There is a wonderful reward in store. And this is a reason *not* to be afraid.
- I love what N.T. Wright says about this section: *"From the first-century Mediterranean world to the twenty-first century in China, in the Sudan and in many other places, there have been plenty of people determined to stamp out this 'Christian nonsense' and to use every trick in the book to do so. In the post-Christian West today, the forces of skepticism and cynicism within our culture are extremely powerful, not least in newspapers and on television. It's easy for Christians to feel intimidated; but Paul insists that we mustn't."* He goes on to say, *"Appropriate public behavior and united work for the gospel will together send a signal to opponents: we're not afraid. And that signal is itself part of the gospel message. It functions as a sign to the Christians that they already belong to the coming King, and to their opponents that the new world is beginning in which the threats of the old one don't work anymore."* (N.T. Wright for Everyone Bible Study Guides: *Philippians*, © 2009 InterVarsity Press)
- Here in America, we're not experiencing anything close to the overtness of persecution that Paul and the Philippians were living in. Yet, we face a quite pervasive sense of opposition in our broader culture to living out a truly devoted, authentic lifestyle of the Gospel. There is a *lot* in "the spirit of the age" that sets itself against believing in Christ and living for Christ and standing on His Word authentically today.
- *What if we stopped being afraid? What if we were no longer intimidated by the forces of this world that oppose the Good News of Jesus?* If we are truly united with Christ and living for Christ, then whoever and whatever opposes us is *opposing Christ*—and if that's true, then there is no way they can ultimately succeed. So, why don't we just stop being afraid? Whatever happens, if we want to pull that off, we have to do it *together*.
- **Philippians 2:1-5**
 - V. 1 *Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion...*
 - Stop there for a moment and take that in: *encouragement* from being united with Christ, *comfort* from his love, *sharing* in the Spirit, tenderness and compassion. Our souls, in this age as much as ever, are crying out for this—and it's found *in being united with Christ*. Look no further than *union with God* for the fulfillment you are longing for.

- For Paul and the New Testament, salvation boils down to *being united with Christ*. To be saved is to be *in Christ* and to be *in Christ* is to be *saved*.
- V. 2-4...*then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*
 - Wow. That is a pretty powerful unity. If you are united with Christ, then you are equally united with His people. Your union with other Christians in the Church is as real and profound as your union with Christ. So, do we value the Church as much as He does?
 - We're going to say it again and again, this is not an *individualistic* thing and this is not a *spectator* thing. We have to do this *together* if we're going to do it at all.
 - The unity spoken of here is not based on uniformity—it's not so much based on coming into alignment with other people; it's based on all of us coming into alignment with *Christ* and His Gospel. Christ alone is the basis for the unity of this huge, diverse, complicated community called Church. It has to be the *love of Christ* and the Spirit of God that unites us—nothing else will.
 - Have you noticed the way people are brought together by loving something greater than themselves? I think back to soccer games and live concerts I've been to: the people gathered together to support that team or that band are often as diverse as they come. I can picture the supporters section at the Philadelphia Union stadium, as united as an army, cheering on the team wildly with every goal like it was the greatest moment of their lives—this is a motley crew of people with different ethnicities, political views, personalities, even moral convictions and lifestyles—all of them operating as one wild and passionate community for the love of the game.
 - The same could be said of the 12 disciples and the early church. What was their common denominator? You already know.
- V. 5 *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...*
 - *Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...* other translations say, “the same *attitude* as Christ,” “think the same way that Christ thought,” “think of yourselves the way Christ thought of himself,” and even most literally, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”
 - And the very next sentence begins next week's passage, which describes in the most profound of ways who Jesus is, what He did, and how He thinks—as the only one who is fully human and fully God, and the King above all kings.
- **Conclusion**
 - To finish, let's circle back to the start: “*Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ...*”
 - Figuring out what this means is a lot of what it means to be a Christian: it's a journey of discovering more and more who this Christ is, what His Gospel means, and how to live like it's *really* true.
 - How *real* is this to you? Do we have such an awareness of your union with Christ that our lives are centered on *pleasing Him*? None of us do this perfectly, but the only way we'll do it is through the grace of Christ—and together, not alone.
 - There is nothing greater than living for the Gospel of Christ, and next week, we're going to dig into just how wonderful Jesus and the Good News about Him really is. Until then, by the grace of God, may we live in Christ, through Christ, and for Christ, to the glory of God. Amen.