

## THE GOSPEL-WORTHY CHURCH (Philippians 1:27-2:4)

It is hard to believe that it has been 30 years, but it was in 1991 that a movie starring the comedian Billy Crystal hit the silver screen. It was called *City Slickers*. Crystal portrays Mitch, a Manhattan Radio Ad Salesman who is having a midlife crisis. His two friends, who have their own problems, surprise him with a birthday present. They have paid the way for all three of them to go on a supervised cattle drive from New Mexico to a ranch in Colorado. Mitch comes up with excuses as to why he can't do that. His wife convinces him to go believing this may be therapeutic for him.

Jack Palance won a Best Supporting Actor Academy Award for his portrayal of Curly, the Boss of the Cattle Drive. He is an intimidating, tough as an old boot, aging cowboy who, surprisingly, helps Mitch work through his crisis.

In one poignant scene, Mitch and Curly, are riding side-by-side, each atop his own horse. Curly says: "Y'all come up here about the same time with the same problems. You spend 50 weeks a year getting knots in your rope and you think 2 weeks up here will untie them for you. None of you get it."

Curly looks at Mitch and asks, "Do you know what the secret of life is?" He points his gloved index finger skyward and says, "This."

Mitch asks, "Your finger?"

Curly replies, "One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that, and the rest don't mean nothin'."

Mitch desperately asks, "But, what is the one thing?"

With a smile, Curly answers, "That's what you have to find out."

Today's text begins with a word that is translated most often as "only." One translator rendered it, "Always remember one thing." Karl Barth wrote that Paul raises a warning finger. What is this one essential thing that Paul says we are to remember and do? Let's read our text—Philippians 1:27-2:4.

Paul calls upon the believers in Philippi to be a gospel-worthy church. Then, he tells them how a gospel-worthy church lives. The version of Scripture from which I preach, the ESV, uses 6 words to translate just one word in the Greek text. Those 6 words are: "let your manner of life be." The NIV uses also 5 words: "conduct yourselves in a manner." The NKJV uses 4, "let your conduct be."

While the word simply means *live*, there is so much more hidden within the word Paul used, and it is only found twice in the NT, here and in Acts 23:1. Within the larger word is the smaller Greek word for city—*polis*. From that word we get the English word *metropolis* (mother city), *police*, *politics*, *political*. All of those words deal with the government and protection of the city.

In the Greek world, the city, the community, was of utmost importance. There were certain expectations of how the citizens of the community were to be involved in the life of the community.

In our culture, we are all about the individual. We all have individual rights. We don't want to conform to the group. We want to be individuals and do our own thing, whatever

that thing is.

Paul was writing to Greek people, and he capitalized on what he knew to be their values. The NLT gets at the meaning behind this word. It translates part of this verse to read, “You must live in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ, as citizens of heaven.” Paul is arguing that as Christians, we are not just individuals. We are part of something far larger than ourselves. We are part of God’s Kingdom. Together, we make up His Church. Now, we need to live lives that are worthy of the gospel, the good news about Jesus. There are certain expectations that God has of those who are His.

We are going to look at three ways we are to live gospel-worthy lives and be a gospel-worthy church.

### **The Gospel-Worthy Church Triumphs Together**

I have been known to tell youth and children that the church building is not a playground. The adults of the church need to know that the world in which we find ourselves is also not a playground. It is a battleground. We are at war. The enemy is not the church down the street that worship and believes differently than us. We are not fighting against them; we are fighting with them. They are our allies. The enemy is not lost people who do not know the Lord. That is who we are fighting for. Our enemies are spiritual forces who attack the people of God and the values of God. The Enemy may use people to accomplish his goals, but the real Enemy is not people. The Enemy is Satan and his demonic forces.

Paul calls upon us to fight and to triumph. He tells us how. In v. 27, Paul says that he wants to come and visit his friends in Philippi, but if he is unable to make that trip, he at least wants to hear what they are doing. In the latter part of v. 27, he says that what he wants to hear: “that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”

If we are to be a gospel-worthy church, we must fight for the truth of the gospel against the enemies of the gospel. In order to be victorious, we need to stand together. Unity is crucial if we are going to triumph. If we are divided and fractured and scattered from one another, we have already lost the battle.

In the year 2021, we are living in a nation that is divided and fractured; so, why would anyone want to join a church that is divided and fractured? If, however, we are united and knit together, that will be attractive. That will win the interest of others in our community.

Look at v. 28. If we are going to prevail, we must not be frightened by our enemies. Last Sunday morning, I read to you what God told Joshua, Moses’ successor. Three times in the first 9 verses, He tells Joshua to “be strong and courageous.” That is a message for the church today.

John told his audience, “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”

Paul told those Philippians believers that if they would exhibit no fear, it would signify two things to their opponents. First, they would know they have lost. Second, they would know that God’s people would be rescued by Him.

Last Wednesday night we watched a teaching video about Easter truths we can learn from what Jesus did during Passion Week. In that lesson, J.D. Greear mentioned a man named Polycarp. Two weeks ago, when I was preparing for last Sunday's message, I read a sermon in which the preacher told the story of Polycarp. I'm beginning to think that I need to tell the story of Polycarp.

Let's go back to AD 155 to a city named Smyrna. It was located in what we know of today as the nation of Turkey. Back then, it was part of the Roman Empire. A new wave of persecution was sweeping across the Christian Church. In Smyrna there was a bishop of the church named Polycarp. He had been discipled by John. Now, he was an old man.

When the Christians of Smyrna found out that an arrest warrant had been issued for Polycarp, they hid him in a barn on a farm outside of Smyrna. The police, however, found him and brought him into the city. They marched him to the center of an arena where there were tens of thousands of people screaming for his execution.

As Polycarp was being taken into the arena, a voice came to him from heaven: "Be strong, Polycarp and play the man!" The Proconsul felt sympathy for the old man. He raised up his arm and silenced the crowd. When everything was quiet, the Proconsul shouted out, "Polycarp! Curse the Christ and live!"

Polycarp, with a strong voice, answered back, "Eighty and six years have I served my master and king, and he has done me no wrong. I dare not blaspheme him now."

"Swear by Caesar's fortune," the Proconsul shouted.

"If you imagine that I will swear by Caesar's fortune, as you put it, pretending not to know who I am, I will tell you plainly, I am a Christian."

The Proconsul threatened, "I have wild beasts. I shall throw you to them, if you don't change your attitude."

"Call them," Polycarp urged.

"If you make light of the beasts," the Proconsul said, "I'll have you destroyed by fire."

Polycarp replied, "The fire you threaten with burns for a time and is soon extinguished. There is a fire you know nothing about: the fire of the judgment to come, and of eternal punishment, the fire reserved for the ungodly. But why do you hesitate? Do what you want."

"Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian," the Proconsul announced to the crowd. "This fellow is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods, who teaches numbers of people not to sacrifice or even worship."

The mob called for his death, and as he was set aflame, he prayed, "I bless thee for counting me worthy of this day and hour, that in the number of the martyrs I may partake of Christ's cup, to the resurrection of body and soul."

Polycarp showed no fear. In doing so, he gave courage to the Church in Smyrna and countless others.

I want you to see what Jesus said in Revelation 2:8-10. It has direct bearing on the story I just told. Polycarp did just what Jesus said. He did not fear. Neither should we. Let us triumph together.

This story also leads us to the next thing Paul taught us to do in order to be a gospel-

worthy church. Look at vv. 29-30.

## **The Gospel-Worthy Church Suffers Together**

Have you ever viewed suffering for Jesus as being a gift? Paul told those believers in Philippi that suffering had been granted to them. He even equated that gift with the gift of believing in Jesus.

We are all for received the gift of believing in Jesus, but we are not so keen on receiving the gift of suffering for Jesus. It might be helpful to realize that Jesus also considered us being persecuted for him as being a gift. Look at what Jesus said in Matthew 5:10-12. He said that we are blessed when we are persecuted for Him. Notice v. 11 there in Matthew 5.

Take note that Jesus did not use the word *if*. He said *when*. As far as Jesus is concerned, our persecution is not a possibility. It is an inevitability. It is a certainty. If we follow Jesus, we will be persecuted in some shape or fashion. You may not have to forfeit your life like Polycarp, but you may be called upon to give something else up. You may have to give up friends, popularity, and the support of those who are opposed to Jesus and His teachings.

In our country, Christian professors have been denied tenure. Others have been passed over for promotions. Some have been fired.

I have been reading a book entitled, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*. The author makes the case that our country is becoming a totalitarian state. We are not becoming totalitarian in the sense that Nazi Germany was or the Soviet Union or China. In those places, there was or are secret police who go around arresting people and throwing them into prison. He says that, instead, we are experiencing what he calls soft totalitarianism.

In our country, an ideology has overtaken businesses, universities, political parties, and other groups. When you don't toe the party line, you won't be arrested, but you will most certainly pay a price.

Here's one paragraph written by the author, Ron Dreher:

One imagines an entry-level worker at a Fortune 500 firm, or an untenured university lecturer, suffering through the hundredth workshop on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and doing their best not to be suspected of dissent. In fact, I don't have to imagine it at all. As a journalist who writes about these issues, I often hear stories from people—always white-collar professionals like academics, doctors, lawyers, engineers—who live closeted lives as religious or social conservatives. They know that to dissent from the progressive regime in the workplace, or even to be suspected of dissent, would likely mean burning their careers at the stake.

Let me give you fair warning, if you take a public stand for Jesus and biblical morality, watch out! You will become a target. But don't stand alone. Let's stand together.

Paul had suffered for the sake of Christ. Suffering was coming to the Church in Philippi. We will not escape it either. The reward of suffering may not be received here on earth, but we will not be forgotten by God.

Consider the story of Henry Morrison and his wife. They faithfully served the Lord as missionaries in the continent of Africa for 40 years. When they retired, they sailed home by ship to New York City. Henry wondered aloud to his wife, “I wonder if there will be anyone to welcome us home.” As the ship pulled into the harbor, bands were playing. A large crowd of well-wishers had gathered, but they were not there to welcome home the Morrison’s. It just so happened that President Teddy Roosevelt was on the same ship and was returning from a two-week hunting trip to Africa.

By the time that Henry Morrison and his wife had disembarked, the crowds had dispersed, and there was no one to greet them— no denominational official, no one from the sending agency, no old friend. The aged couple, with luggage to carry, were able to hail a cab which took them to a small, one room apartment that had been rented for them.

By the time they got there, Henry was seething with anger. His wife told him, “You need to take this to the Lord.” Henry retreated to that one, lone, small bedroom. He knelt down by the bed and poured out his hurt and heart to God.

About 10 or 15 minutes later, he returned to the front room, and his face was beaming. His wife inquired about the change. He said to her, “I told God how upset I was that the president leaves for a two-week hunting trip and is welcomed home by a multitude. We leave God to serve him overseas for 40 years, and no one welcomes us home. Then, it felt as though God put his hand on my shoulder and said, “But Henry, you are not home, yet.”

Brothers and sisters, there will be persecution in this life, but remember, we aren’t home, yet.

## **The Gospel Worthy-Church Comes Together**

The first four verses of chapter 2 beautifully portray how believers are to treat one another. In v. 1, Paul offers four motivations we have for unity and selflessly loving one another. The word *if* carries the idea of *since*. Let me re-read or rather paraphrase v. 1 using the word *since* instead of *if*.

In v. 1, Paul uses the inducement of the blessing we have. Because of what we have received, we should strive to protect the unity of the church.

In v. 2, Paul uses a second inducement. In addition to what we have, Paul says, “Here’s what I want.” He is saying, “Dear Philippians, you have blessed me in other ways, now bless me in this way. I have received joy from you, but now, make this joy especially joyous.”

In 1986 I graduated from college. Sometime before graduation, I was invited to preach at the church in which I grew up—Mayfair Baptist Church in OKC. I preached from the second chapter of Philippians. I entitled my sermon, “How to Bring Joy to Your Pastor.” I said that Paul was a missionary with a pastor’s heart.

Borrowing from that sermon I preached when I was 21, let me encourage you to join

me in doing three things. **Let's seek to have the same mind.** That is v. 2.

**Let' seek to have the selfless mind.** That is vv. 3-4.

**Third, let's seek to have the Savior's mind.** That is v. 5.

If we will do those three things, not only will you bring joy to this pastor's heart, but more importantly, you will bring joy to God's heart.

I began this message with an illustration from a 1991 movie. Let me close with one from a 1987 movie and one of my favorites—*The Princess Bride*.

The story opens in the home of a beautiful, young lady named Buttercup. Before she becomes a princess, she lives in a small house that sits upon a hill in the countryside. She is dressed in drab, brown clothes and is clearly a peasant girl. Another peasant named Wesley (Cary Elwes) is a laborer on the farm. The narrator says that Buttercup's greatest pleasure in life is tormenting Wesley. She refers to him as "farm boy." Using whatever authority she has, she orders him about.

Yet no matter how menial the task, Wesley always responds the same way: "As you wish."

"Farm boy," Buttercup says, "polish my horse's saddle."

"As you wish."

"Farm boy," she says as she drops two pails at his feet, "fill this with water."

"As you wish."

"Farm boy, fetch me that pitcher."

"As you wish."

Although Buttercup is terribly condescending, Wesley is the model servant. He never refuses her demands. He is always kind and willing.

The narrator reveals that one day, Buttercup has a life-changing insight. He reads, "That day, she was amazed to discover that when he was saying 'As you wish,' what he meant was, 'I love you.'"

When we obey the Lord's commands, we are saying to Him, "I love you." When we selflessly serve one another, we are really saying, "I love you."

We are saved by a gospel that teaches us that God loves us. To live a gospel-worthy life and to be a gospel-worthy church, we are to love one another as He loved us.