

One of the great problems of living in a world like ours...where everyone is free to do whatever they want just so long as they don't bother anyone else...is that it is so very hard to make judgments like good or valuable or worthy. When there is no objective standard of right and wrong, good and evil, worthy or wicked...then pretty much all you are left with is "Do whatever you want, just be true to yourself!" As long as you live a life of authenticity and respect to who you truly are, then don't worry, be happy, knowing that your life is good and valuable and worthy of everyone's respect and tolerance. Everyone is free to do and think and feel and be whatever is right in their own eyes.

It isn't surprising, is it, that in this sort of a culture, like the one in which we live, most of the famous people are entertainers and celebrities? If only we were like that, then we could truly be ourselves – we could do whatever we wanted, buy whatever we wanted, go wherever we wanted, hang out with whomever we wanted. A culture such as that might even end up with a celebrity or an entertainer as their president. 😊 [PAUSE]

It can be hard, can't it, living in this culture, to make judgments about a "worthy life"? [PAUSE] Just try to say that someone is living an unworthy life and get ready...""You don't know me!" "You can't judge me!" And suddenly lives of character and value and worth mean simply whatever you want them to look like. [PAUSE}

But not if you are a Christian. A Christian, by definition, is a person who makes distinctions and declarations about what is good and valuable and worthy. Because our God has objective standards. He, and he alone declares what is good and right and just and worthy. He says it, that settles it. And we as his people are called to know his standards and conform ourselves to them.

If Pastor Alvis had kept reading in Philippians 2, we would read this in vv. 12-13 – "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Or back up

in 1:6 – “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Christians are people in whom God has started a work, he is at work in us. And Christians are people who are at work in themselves, we are working out our salvation.

Christians are those whom God has called to live worthy lives in obedience to him. And that is what the apostle Paul says right at the beginning of our passage for today, in 1:27, Paul tells the church that he loved at Philippi – “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ”. This word “gospel” is the Greek word “euangelion”, it means good news, news to be heralded and declared. It is used in the NT as the good news that is declared when a new king is enthroned. And Paul says that as Christians, we are those who are followers of the True King, Jesus Christ. We have submitted to his rule and authority in our lives, over our lives. He is our King. We have submitted to the gospel of Christ, the good news of King Jesus.

And if Jesus is your King, then your life should reflect it. The problem in our culture – what we see in the world around us – is what happens when everyone is their own king. The “Gospel of our World” is this - “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Jeff!” Oh man, I can DO this! 😊 And I don’t even HAVE TO TRY!! It just happens. But it doesn’t work. We can’t rule ourselves. We can’t rule our lives. We make a mess out of everything we touch. And we are too afraid to answer the only important question that gnaws at our conscience – how’s this working out for me?

A Christian is simply someone who submits themselves completely – no reservations – to the gospel of Christ. Repentance means turning away to the gospel of self, the kingship of self, and humbly accepting the Kingship of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

And once we become followers of King Jesus, we are called to live a life that is worthy to be called Christian. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. And so we go against our culture and say that there is such a

thing as a worthy life and such a thing as a life that is unworthy and dishonoring to the name of Christian and to the Christ whom we serve.

What does the worthy life look like? The Bible gives us answers all throughout its pages...from beginning to end. But we get a clear picture here in this passage in Philippians. And Paul says quite clearly that a worthy life, a life worthy of the gospel of Christ, of the name Christian is marked by at least four things – standing firm, being united, humility and service.

So here is a very practical sermon for you. Here is a sermon that will be very easy for you to apply to your own life. Do you want to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ? Do you want to honor the name of Christ which you bear as a Christian? Well then, here are some very clear and simple (not simplistic) commands from God for your life this morning –stand firm, be united, be humble, be a servant.

STANDING FIRM

So let's look at this passage, Philippians 1:27-2:11 with the desire that we would go from this place eager to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ – and it isn't ONLY these four things that make up the worthy life – we could make the list 104 things – but a worthy life contains at least these things...and they seem pretty central to the apostle Paul, so let's meditate upon them a bit this morning.

And we begin with steadfastness...which seems like it might be “worthy mark” #1 for Paul – does it seem like that to you? Look at 1:27 and see if you agree – “27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,”. Paul is writing this letter from prison and chapter 1 makes it clear that Paul isn't sure whether he is going to live or die there – but to live is Christ, to die is gain (1:21). He isn't sure if he will ever see these Christians again.

He might see them. He might hear a report about them. Either way, what does he want? What does 1:27 say? “I may hear of you...that you are standing firm”. Paul was in prison because he was a Christian. He would die because he was a Christian. When Paul first visited Philippi (Acts 16) he is thrown in prison there. And vv. 28-30 make it very clear that the Philippians aren’t going to escape the suffering that Paul experienced from their fellow citizens. Opponents will try to frighten and intimidate them (v. 28) but just as they heard (or even saw?) that Paul was steadfast while in Philippi he declared the gospel of Jesus Christ, so to this church must remain steadfast.

Paul even go so far as to say that suffering “has been granted” to these Christians – look at verses 29-30 - 29 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, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. Paul is saying that this suffering and struggle and conflict is actually a mark of the true Christian living a worthy life in the world. The world murdered our Savior. The world murdered his disciples. The world hated our King and it hates his loyal subjects. But Christ told us “in the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Are you a follower of King Jesus this morning? Then the world will hate you. You will suffer because you follow Christ. Your faith in Jesus will bring you into conflict with this godless world. “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.” (Heb. 10:39) Stand firm, be steadfast in the truth of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Don’t be frightened by your opponents, whoever they may be – family, friends, the culture. Trust Christ, follow Christ, and join with the saints throughout the ages who have stood firm in their faith.

UNITY

Every Christian who wants to live a life worthy of the gospel must be steadfast and stand firm. But they are not to do it alone! If you look back at

1:27, we see very clearly that Paul is telling a group of people – the church at Philippi – to do this TOGETHER. Stand firm – Christians. Stand firm – church. Do it individually. Do it together. So...these verses make it very clear that the worthy life isn't a SOLO project of standing firm. The church must do it together. In fact, 1:29 tells us that it is the reality of the church united, standing firm together, that is a clear sign to the opponents of Christ's church that they are doomed to destruction.

Notice the corporate language that Paul uses in verse 27 – "...I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel." The word "spirit" there is most likely a reference to the Holy Spirit who gives new life to every Christian and knits us together as brothers and sisters in Christ. We are one in the Spirit. The Spirit of Christ dwells in us and among us. And so we stand firm in one spirit, together against the opponents of Christ. We also stand together with "one mind" – this word translated "mind" is psyche in Greek and it refers to the sphere of the affections and moral energies.

So together as Christians, as it relates to our affections and our moral energy, we stand firm, side by side for the faith of the gospel. We love the things that God loves. We hate the things he hates. We take moral positions that accord with his truth and the teaching of the Bible. We do it together, in conversation with other Christians. We find a source of strength and encouragement from our brothers and sisters who labor and struggle and suffer alongside us. We share our victories and defeats our joys and disappointments.

And as we do this notice the profound significance and result there in verse 28 – it is a clear sign of the destruction of the unbelieving world and a clear sign to Christians of our salvation. The worthy life of a Christian, truly living for Christ in a hostile world should bring conviction to the watching world. Like the centurion at the foot of the cross who proclaimed – "Surely this is the Son of God" – Christians who continue to live and love like Christ in the

midst of suffering and persecution, who actively seek to be salt and light in the world undaunted by any opposition that may come are a convicting presence in a godless world. Paul says Christians living like this will be a “clear sign to them of their destruction”.

But Paul also tells us that this experience of unity in suffering and standing firm in the midst of it also works a confidence of salvation in the life of the Christian. As we stand unafraid and unwavering in the midst of persecution, we find that our faith in God is confirmed and strengthened. We see God leading and guiding us by his Spirit and filling us with faith and hope and love. We find the reality of the gospel proving true in our lives – we are able to pray for those who persecute us, to forgive those who wrong us, and to trust ourselves completely to our faithful Creator and Sustainer.

This theme of unity is so central to what a worthy life looks like that Paul picks right up on this theme again in 2:2. But now Paul’s focus is a bit different. Bible scholar Alec Motyer summarizes it like this – “...unity is not just a useful weapon against the world, but rather it belongs to the very essence of Christian life, for it is the way in which Christians display outwardly what the gospel is and means to them. Unity is the gospel’s hallmark”. That is exactly right. Paul says that nothing would give him more joy, it would complete his joy, if Christians would be truly united.

Look at verse 2 with me – “...complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” The word “mind” that Paul uses here is different from the one he uses in 1:27. Here the word is φρονέω (fro-ne-o) and it means simply our thoughts or opinions. So Paul says that Christians are to be united in our thoughts and opinions, our loves, and we are to be agreed about these things. Notice he uses that word twice here in verse 2. Literally, you could translate this verse, “think the same thing...thinking the one thing”.

NOTE – this is unity regarding the gospel of Christ, the central truths of the Christian faith. Christians don't have to believe the EXACT SAME THING about EVERYTHING...there is great freedom for personality and preference as Christians. Unity does not mean uniformity. But at the heart of the Christian message are truths that are non-negotiable – we could take the Apostles Creed or Nicene Creed as core, central truths that Christians have been united on for centuries.

But on non-essential issues, in the practical application of how we live out the Christian life, there will always be differences of opinions and personalities and preferences among Christians, and that is one of the wonderful blessings of this life – experiencing the way in which the love of God is displayed differently in the lives of Christians as they faithfully follow him...seeing how God has created us all differently, gifted us all differently, wired us differently, and used us all differently to display his glory in the world.

Do you want to live a worthy life as a Christian? We all do, don't we. Then let us work very hard to be united around the core, central truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

HUMILITY & SERVICE

Paul continues his portrait of the worthy life in verses 3 & 4 with two other characteristics – humility and service. We are just going to skim over these...don't worry...

Someone might want to argue that this is simply two ways that unity of mind is worked out...and that might be...they seem pretty inter-connected, don't they? And if you look down at verse 5, that word "mind" occurs again as Paul goes on to give the supreme example of what humility and service look like in the life of Christ Jesus our Lord. So perhaps these shouldn't be separate, perhaps these are what true unity looks like in a church – humility and servant-heartedness?

Regardless, if you want to live a life worthy of the gospel, then these two qualities must mark every Christian – you must be humble and you must be a servant. Look at verses 3 & 4 with me – “3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Now these verse don't teach that it is wrong to look to your own interests – to care for your own needs and the needs of those around you. It is wrong to look ONLY to your own interests or to look to your own interests with selfish ambition, self-regard, or a proud desire to put yourself first. We all have to fight against this desire, don't we...it isn't even really a desire, it is just a normal, default setting...to look out for ourselves first. But the Bible teaches us that Christian harmony and unity comes about when in humility and a desire to serve we count others more significant than us and worthy of our service and our concern and our care.

Pride and selfishness are right at the heart of all sin and unbelief. It destroyed the devil and ruined our first parents. And it continues to destroy people and churches. But the gospel good news tells us that there is a man, Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect human life – he was tempted in every way that you and I are, but never gave in to pride or selfishness in thought or attitude or deed. He lived the life that you and I should have lived, but didn't. And they nailed him to a cross for it, which he willingly did, because he knew that his death would be the atoning sacrifice for all who looked to him in faith. He died our death. But then he rose again triumphant from the grave, giving all of us hope that one day, though we die in this body, will be resurrected like Christ to dwell on a new earth in new bodies for all eternity.

But until the glorious return of Christ, we are to have the mind of Christ – we are to humbly and sacrificially look to the needs of others, just as he did. And as we close this morning, we have a glorious picture of the work of Christ.

We could spend another hour on these verses, but we are out of time and cannot do more than read them. But as we do, let's bear in mind all that has come before these verses – the goal of a worthy life, a life of steadfast obedience in the face of suffering, unity around a single message and purpose, humility and service – they all find their culmination in Christ Jesus. But not just their culmination, but their source as well.

To live is Christ – our faith and hope are in him – his life, his work, his death, his resurrection, his ascension and his glorious return. He is our head, our example, our teacher. We humbly follow the humble king. We join together as his disciples, seeking to be his body on this earth. His life is the most worthy life ever lived. And all who bear the name Christian are called to follow him and live as he lived.

So I close with this glorious picture of Christ our King, 2:5-11.

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.