
GRIPPED BY THE GOSPEL: JOY IN HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP

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Philippians 1:27-2:11

HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP (27-30)

As we continue our work through the book of Philippians, let's get caught up to speed. In chapter one, Paul begins this letter declaring not only his identity as a slave of Christ, but also the identity of the church in Philippi as saints. He then affirmed their partnership in the gospel with thanksgiving and prayer. Last week, we heard Paul encourage this church in the midst of his and their sufferings. Despite imprisonment and adversity, the gospel was going and growing. And Paul is confident of his deliverance because of his confidence in Christ. He goes on to say that whether he lives or dies, his hope is to glorify Christ. Please turn with me to Philippians chapter 1, verse 27, where we will begin this morning. But before we do that, let's pray.

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, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

EVIDENCE OF HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP (27-28A)

Paul opens this section of text, with the words "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel." I prefer the NLT's rendering of verse 27. It is translated as, "Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ." This is the way Paul has been living as evidenced by the preceding paragraphs we reviewed. He has been living as a person belonging to another kingdom. He has a godly, eternal perspective on his situation and his life. He is able to have joy in the trials he is facing, because his hope is not in this world. He finds joy in God's people, because they are his family. Most importantly, has joy because his confidence is always in Christ. So, he encourages them, in the meantime, while you are waiting to hear of my outcome, live a life worthy of the gospel. Note, not live a life deserving of the gospel, but rather worthy of the gospel. This is not living in a way as to earn a reward of salvation, but rather be who you are because of your salvation. Live a life representative of your great God and King. Don't forget who you are in Christ. Don't forget where your true home is. With your mind on your new home, live as citizens of that home, and not Rome. The city of Philippi was a representative of a distant kingdom, that being Rome. Paul was calling the Philippian believers to representatives of their distant kingdom, heaven. That is a strong statement for them. In essence, give up all your rights and protections of Rome, and follow Jesus. You are no longer serving the Roman ruler, but you are now serving a new King. This citizenship theme will run throughout the rest of this letter. Paul knows that for the Philippian church to live a life worthy of the gospel, it is not dependent on him. Therefore, he says that whether he is present or absent, they are to live this way. This is the work of Christ in them. So, what does it look like to live as "citizens of heaven?" What evidence will you see?

STANDING FIRM IN ONE SPIRIT

First, we will stand firm in one spirit. The single most important unifying element for all of us believers is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This is the most important reference point in our relationships. Our commonality is the gospel. Yes, it is great if there are other unifying elements. Such as similar backgrounds, interests, and likes, but they should only be the icing on the cake. That means, regardless of our backgrounds, interests, or experiences, we ought to be unified because of the gospel alone. We are to have unity in light of our diversity.

STANDING FIRM WITH ONE MIND

Secondly, our gospel community will be evidenced through unity of mind. The idea here is actually purpose. We will have a unified purpose. That purpose is to glorify God and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to a dying world. And we will proclaim Christ to one another in our living, loving, and serving each other in unity.

STRIVING SIDE BY SIDE

Thirdly, we will be a people who are striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. "Striving side by side" is derived from a root that sometimes refers to athletic competition. (The birthplace of the original Olympics lay some distance south of Philippi in Achaia.) Yet ancient Greek athletics developed out of military training for combat. Here, Paul is thinking in terms of mortal combat. He paints the picture of an advancing line of Roman legionnaires, their long shields forming both a seamless wall before them and a "roof" over their heads against the enemy's arrows and spears. His point is: "Don't let the opposition divide you! Instead, let the pressures from your opponent's draw you together in a deeper and stronger unity!" Paul was alluding to the pressure they were facing and would face as they continued to live as citizens of heaven instead of Rome. So, he was reminding them that they are living and fighting for something bigger than themselves. They are living and fighting for a heavenly city, an eternal kingdom, ruled by the King of kings, and the Lord of lords.

NOT FRIGHTENED

Finally, be not frightened. Don't get shaken or spooked by anything your opponents throw at you. A fearlessness ought to shine from us that comes from faith. Faith is an unwavering confidence in Christ and the gospel, not in ourselves. When the opposition seems great, we then say with the psalmist, "Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer, from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy."

We don't fight like the world fights. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ. Therefore, citizens of heaven focus their hearts and minds on the living God. They meditate on His majesty, His power, and His attributes. The more

we are faced by opposition, the more we should cling tighter to Christ and tighter to one another. Do not flinch when the opposition comes. Stand firm in unity, despite the enemy's formidable presence and power. Stand firm in faith, stand firm, believing in the gospel. This is the evidence of our faith and it will have powerful effects. Read with me picking up in verse 28.

EFFECTS OF GOSPEL LIVING (28B-30)

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, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. 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.

Our fearless unity of purpose defeats the spiritual battles that wage war against our heavenly kingdom. Yes, to them, their enemies appeared as Roman citizens or even Jewish rabbis. But as Paul says in Ephesians 6:12,

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

Every battle we face outside the church and every battle inside the church is a spiritual battle. It is not me versus you. But us, in Christ, versus the spiritual enemies of darkness. And note, Paul does not mean we will actually see their demise in the present. But the day will come, when Christ returns, when we will see the enemies' ultimate destruction. That is the work God will complete at the day of Christ. This is why Paul alludes the Christ's returns multiple times in this letter.

Also, it is more confirmation of our salvation. Our oneness is a sign of their destruction and salvation. Finally, notice Paul ends this sentence with, "and that from God." Our standing firm does not come from mere human effort. This is the work of God. Our salvation is from him. Our standing firm in fearlessness is the evidence that we have already received the guarantee of this salvation.

The next sentence begins with "for", or "because". So, because you have received this great salvation from God. Because you have escaped the wrath to come. Because you are no longer a slave to sin and death. Because you have been the recipient of mercy and grace. You have not only been given the privilege or grace to believe but you have also been graced to suffer for his sake. That's the intended meaning of "granted" here. It is "graced." Our suffering for the sake of the gospel is a grace of God. This means that we take upon our own bodies the sufferings of Christ. Recall the apostles were beaten in Acts 5 and charged not to speak in the name of Jesus. What was their response? They rejoiced! They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for His name.

Paul then assures them that this suffering is not unique to them. Because of their union in Christ, their partnership in the gospel, they are engaged in the same conflict as Paul. Their suffering is identical to the suffering he had faced in Acts 16 when the Philippian church began and to the suffering, he was facing at the time he was writing to them. How does one live supernaturally, rejoicing in suffering for Christ and yet maintaining unity? Only those who

have their minds set on Jesus Christ and the inheritance secured for us will have the supernatural ability to view their suffering as a grace of God. And see it as a privilege. Let's read on.

HEAVENLY KING (2:1-2)

¹*So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,* ²*complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*

UNION IN CHRIST (2:1)

This is how we do it. We think much upon Christ! To be clear, Paul is not asking IF they have ever received any of these things from Christ. He is establishing an argument. Listen to the NLT, ***“Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?”*** The NLT states them as rhetorical questions. But also, we should see them as reminders, to think on these times:

Yes, I have been encouraged because I belong to Christ, (especially when I consider all that I have received in Him);

Yes, I have been comforted from His love, (especially when I consider that nothing can separate me from it);

Yes, I have had fellowship in the Spirit, (especially when I trust His sovereignty and goodness, and can say, “Not my will, but Yours be done”;

And, yes, my heart is tender and compassionate, (especially when I consider the work of Christ in my life, and how that has caused my care and concern for others to grow.)

These are the things we are to be thinking on and the ways we are to encourage one another to think as we attend our weekly gatherings. We are partakers of grace.

UNITY IN CHRIST (2:2)

Paul continues, now that you have been reminded of your union with Christ, complete my joy. What brings Paul joy? The gospel and their partnership in it with him. Paul is confident that God will finish what He started in this church. Yes, he still he prays for them and encourages them because God does His work through people. So, Paul shares with them how to do this-- unity with one another in Christ. Our unity testifies to our union with Christ and preaches the gospel. Listen as I read a portion of Jesus' prayer from John 17:20 - 23 picking up after He has just prayed for His disciples:

²⁰ ***“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*** ²² ***The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,*** ²³ ***I in them and you in me, that they***

may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

Our unity declares the good news to a lost and dying world. According to Paul, this involves having the same mind, same love, being in full accord or complete agreement, and of one mind. This is the second time Paul has picked up on the phrase “one mind.” He did it earlier in 1:27, and here he not only says one mind, but also the same mind. This one spirit that we possess is the initiator of the work God is doing. However, this idea of mind is huge. We are called not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our mind, that by testing we may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Remember in just the previous paragraph, Paul was using this as it related to our purpose. Our purpose to proclaim glorify God and the gospel. Brothers and Sisters, if we are not renewing our minds, we will be conformed to this world. We will not look any different from the world. But, if we are saturating ourselves with the things of heaven, we will look like citizens of that country, citizens who are unified. Please note, though, that this is done by testing, it is not done in a vacuum, but in community.

HEAVENLY LIVING (2:3-11)

As our minds are set our minds on our heavenly king and kingdom, then let us live out who we are. In the kingdom of God, Paul knows it is humility that is the highest honor. Therefore, he entreats the church at Philippi with the instructions in verse 3 and 4. Read with me:

EXHORTATION FOR HUMILITY (3-4)

³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Paul has taken the time in his letter to remind the Philippians of their identity as saints. He has reminded them of the salvation they have from God and what they have received in Christ, and that because of the Spirit, they are of the same mind and the same love. These are the indicatives. Now, he moves on to the imperatives. In other words, because of who you are and what you have live this way. The same grace they received to believe and suffer, is the same grace that will give them the power to obey these commands.

They are not to live for themselves or make a name for themselves. Rather, they are to consider others more significant or more important than themselves. They are not to only think about what they desire, but to think about the desires of others. They are called to live a life of humility. This is not only counter cultural; this is impossible without the work of the spirit. Does this describe the world you live in? Does it describe your workplace? Your home? Our church?

It reminds us of this:

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.”

“So, whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

It reminds us that those who live this way are not of this world, theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Paul now writes in verse 5, the following:

EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY (5-8)

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.

Paul has referred to the mind three times already in terms of “one mind” and the “same” mind. Now he says, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” He has gotten very specific about the kind of thinking he has been alluding to in the previous verses. In addition, he wants to be clear that only those in Christ Jesus will even be capable of thinking in the way he is about to unpack for us in the following verses. In other words, the citizens of heaven are about to see the perfect picture of humility that was lived out by their king in order to purchase their citizenship.

Walk with me through this text:

“Though he was in the form of God” -- In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. Jesus is God.

“did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” - This means that even though Jesus was God, He did not consider His equality with God, His rights as the Son of God, as something He should cling to or hold on to. Can we get this? Jesus truly deserves ALL that He has. All things were created, through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. The reason the you exist is because of Jesus. The oxygen you breath is because of Jesus. The earth is still spinning right now because of Jesus. And He gave up His rights. Do we do that? Or is our mindset, “I worked for that.” “I deserve that...”

“but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”-- And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us; He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him: He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. This is what He got when He gave up what was rightly His. Can you feel the weight of that? The Light of the World, came

into the darkness. The Creator of humanity, put Himself into their care and obeyed the authority of Mary and Joseph.

“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”- The God of Moses, put Himself under the law. The Holy One allowed Himself to be hungry and thirsty, and then be tempted by Satan. The King of kings obeyed the very government systems He established. The ONLY RIGHTEOUS ONE obeyed to the degree that He died the death of a criminal, counted among the transgressors.

Why did He do this? It was not for Himself. It was ultimately for the glory of God the Father, and for your good. And, because of Jesus’ humble and obedient mindset and heart, God the Father exalted Him. Read with me verse 9-11.

EXALTATION OF HUMILITY (9-11)

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.

Because Jesus’ obedience, He is high and lifted up. There is no name higher than His name. The humble One is the Exalted One. One day every eye will see Him as He is and every knee will bow because that’s what He deserves, He is worthy of all our praise. He is Lord, and God gets the glory.

This is the way of the kingdom. The way to be the greatest is to be the servant of all. The path of humility leads to exaltation. The way to life is through death, especially death to self. It is the upside kingdom, not like the kingdoms of this world. Therefore, the citizens of this heavenly, upside down kingdom, don’t live like this fallen world. Take heart, in this world, you will have trouble, but your KING has overcome the world. Let's wrap up.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Where is your citizenship? Are living for this earthly kingdom or the heavenly one? How can you tell?

Do your relationships here, reflect kingdom or earthly citizenship? Are you striving side by side with one another here?

When struggles between each arise, do you see them as spiritual battles?

Finally, how much do you reflect on the humility and grace of Jesus? Are dying to self or living for self?