

Text: Philippians 1:27-30

Title: “An Unchained Witness”

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Philippians 1:27. God is moving in our church in these days. We're praying for Him to give us a greater hunger to know Him intimately, greater faith to follow Him fully and a greater passion to share Him fearlessly. **Read Philippians 1:27-30.**

ILLUSTRATION – If you have been involved in strategic planning where you work you may have heard about something called a B-HAG. It stands for a big, hairy audacious goal. A B-HAG keeps a person or an organization forward-focused. Well the Word of God sets before us today a spiritual B-HAG ... a big, hairy, audacious goal summed up in one sentence.

Philippians 1:27 - Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

This part of the New Testament contains letters written by Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to believers and churches in regions where Paul has proclaimed the Gospel. In this case it is to the believers in Philippi. All through this letter you can feel his heart beating for these friends. Paul is writing from a Roman prison. He's physically chained by his circumstances, but he has discovered a life that is unchained. He's as free as a man can be, even though he's under arrest. How can that be? His circumstances are not *chains* that *restrict* him, but rather they are *keys* that *release* him to a life of exalting Jesus Christ. On the average, in every other verse of this letter Paul speaks of Jesus. His life's B-HAG is Jesus Christ. And he wants the believers in Philippi to have the same B-HAG...

ONE ALL-CONSUMING PASSION ... Behave in a way that is worthy of the Gospel of Christ!

That's the imperative, the command, the apostle of Jesus Christ gives.

Philippians 1:27 - Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Philippians 1:27 (New Century Version) - Only one thing concerns me: Be sure that you live in a way that brings honor to the Good News of Christ.

“Whatever happens” (literally “only one thing”) live your life in a way that is worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Now this is a rich sentence in v.27 that we need to chew on a bit. Look at it again. It isn’t so apparent in the English text, but when the Philippians read or heard these words “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy...” they got it. This terminology was used to challenge citizens to uphold their public responsibility as citizens.

ILLUSTRATION – I grew up in an Air Force home, and much of my life as a boy was lived on an Air Force base, including three years overseas. No matter what part of the world the base was located, when you step on to the base it’s like stepping back into the United States. The flag of the US was flown there. The language of the US was spoken there. Food from the US was sold in the commissary and items from the US were sold in the base exchange. And you could spend American money there. No matter what country you were in, when you drove on to the base you were driving into the US. That base was a colony of the US and while there you should behave as though you were in the US.

Philippi was unique. It was established as a Roman colony. So it is a miniature Rome; the city of Rome was transplanted into that part of the empire. They were an outpost of the Roman Empire. The flag of Rome flew over Philippi. The language of Rome (Latin) was spoken there. The currency had a Roman inscription on it. Philippi was hundreds of miles from Rome, but standing in Philippi was like standing in Rome. And citizens of Philippi were to be proud of that fact, and live their lives in a manner worthy of that distinction.

And Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, piggy-backs on that idea to challenge believers with the one all-consuming passion ... behave in a way that is worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

You see, we live in this world, but we are not of this world. The church is a colony of heaven on earth. We are live a life worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by which we were saved and entered the church. The Gospel of Christ is the Good News of the changed life that is possible through Jesus Christ. We have put our trust in Christ and the message of the Gospel. Our life has changed and we behave in a way that is worthy of the Gospel of Christ because we are citizens of God’s Kingdom. In fact,
Paul will remind them of this later in...

Philippians 3:20 - But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,

So we live in this world, but we are citizens of another world ... the Kingdom of God. We are not ashamed of who we have been saved to become. And we are not ashamed of the One who saved us. Jesus is our Lord and we live as citizens of His Kingdom. We are not ashamed of the message we believed when we were saved.

Let me tell you something about the Gospel. The Gospel is not just an *idea* that is true ... that Jesus Christ came and lived and died and rose again to give us new life. It's not just an idea ... it is an idea that must be shared. You can't take it without giving it away. The very meaning of the word is "Good News that is proclaimed." You can't trust it without it changing your life, changing the way you behave to where you become a living witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others.

So this all-consuming passion is to behave in a way that is a witness of Christ and His Gospel. That means we live as...

1. A CONSISTENT WITNESS (v.27)

Philippians 1:27a - Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence ...

Whatever happens ... no matter what the circumstances. Remember Paul hoped to be released and to return to them to encourage them more. But if that didn't happen nothing changed. Their allegiance was to Jesus Christ. If Paul wasn't there looking over their shoulder, it didn't matter. They would still live faithfully for Christ.

So no matter who's watching, no matter what company you're in, no matter you're going through, behave in a way that is worthy of Jesus Christ.

And a consistent witness is also ...

2. A CONCENTRATED WITNESS (v.27)

Philippians 1:27b – (Then) I will know that you stand firm in one spirit,

Now Paul uses three images to drive home his point ... a military image, an athletic image and an animal image. And here's the military image:

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION - “Stand firm” was a military term that was used of a soldier who refused to retreat or to yield to harsh circumstances or to surrender to an enemy.

We live in a country where there is supposed to be religious liberty ... where we are free to live and proclaim our faith without being restricted. But that is changing. The political climate and the moral climate of our communities is becoming more and more hostile to the Gospel. So when we behave in a way that is worthy of the Gospel we are going to get push-back. We will be ridiculed, laughed at, misunderstood and dismissed as being religious nuts. But we must stand firm. Don't retreat from your assignment to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. Don't pull into your shell and surrender. Stand firm.

Notice the unity here ... stand firm in *one spirit*. Like these soldiers on the screen, we're in this together. We have each other's back.

So this one, all-consuming passion is to behave in a way that is worthy of the Gospel. It's consistent witness, a concentrated witness and it is...

3. A COORDINATED WITNESS (v.27)

Philippians 1:27c - I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

Paul changes the image here. When he talks about “contending as one man” he's talking athletics here. The Greek word for “contending” is the word from which we get our word “athletics.” But there's a little prefix attached to the front of the word that means “together” or “side-by-side.” It's sort of like our prefix “co.” Like a co-author or a co-owner. That little prefix is found 16 times in Philippians signaling to us that Paul really wanted the Philippians to stay united in this. Contend as *one person* or with *one mind*.

And we have to help each other in this. We encourage and stand shoulder to shoulder with one another.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION – Anybody excited about the Cowboys? One aspect of the Cowboys that has contributed to their great success this year is their offensive line. It may be the best in all of professional football. There's Doug Free at 318lbs and Zack Martin at 310lbs and Travis Frederick at 318lbs and Ronald Leary at 320lbs and Tyron Smith at 320lbs. That's a lot of beef! And they contend

as one man. They all have one, all-consuming passion. They each have an assignment and they trust each other to fulfill their individual assignments.

The church is God's team that presents the Gospel to the world. That's our one, all-consuming passion. We stand together all absolutely convinced that there is one solution to mankind's problems ... Jesus Christ and the message of the Gospel ... and that we behave together in a way that is worthy of that Gospel.

There's something else about our witness. It is...

4. A COURAGEOUS WITNESS (v.28)

Paul says, "I know that you will stand firm, contending as one man ...

Philippians 1:28a - without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.

Now Paul changes his image yet again. This time he's painting the picture of a horse or some other animal that is spooked or frightened by a sudden noise. When they hear that noise, they panic and run.

And the Philippians had heard the "noise" of persecution. Paul and his team felt the opposition when they first came to Philippi with the Gospel. They were beaten and thrown in prison. But that didn't stop the Gospel. And now those new believers were experiencing the same kind of opposition.

ILLUSTRATION –A new study shows Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world. The Center for Studies on New Religions said more than 90,000 Christians were killed in 2016 ... that's one every six minutes. One estimate is that between 500 and 600 million Christians worldwide can't freely practice their beliefs. And I don't think we're too far away from that here in the US. So we have to be courageous in the face of these difficulties.

Now our courage will be a warning to the enemies of the Gospel.

Philippians 1:28b - This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed...

Enemies of the Cross and the Gospel may think they will prevail. They won't! They will face the judgment of God someday. But our courage in the face of

opposition is a warning to the enemies of the Gospel, but it is also a confirmation to us of our salvation through the Gospel.

Philippians 1:28 - This is a sign to them that ... you will be saved—and that by God.

The fact that we can stand courageous in our witness proves that we are truly saved and that we will be saved when God sends Christ for His church. The sacrifices we are willing to suffer for our witness for Christ demonstrate the reality of our relationship with Christ. And whatever suffering we have to endure in our faithfulness to the Gospel is a gift!

Philippians 1:29 - For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,

Wait a minute! I'm not sure I understood that when I signed on for this Christianity business. I understand that to believe in and trust Christ is a gift, so *salvation through Christ is a gift*. But I don't think I heard the rest of that ... that *suffering for Christ is a gift*. They go together. So when we are saved we take on this one, all-consuming passion to behave in a way that is worthy of Christ and the Gospel. And that when I do that I will suffer at some point.

QUESTION: Is there any suffering in your life because you are faithful to Christ? Is there anything you are going without because you are faithful to Christ and want others to know Him? Most American Christians can't point to any real hardship they are enduring because of Christ because they're doing everything they can to avoid being uncomfortable, being inconvenienced or being unpopular.

Philippians 3:10 - I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Paul is in Rome suffering for the Gospel. They are in Philippi suffering for Christ and the Gospel. Suffering is to be expected when we're faithful.

Philippians 1:30 - since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

ILLUSTRATION – Baptist Press carried an amazing story last week out of Uganda. Sunni Muslim extremists had sent one of their most zealous teachers to a church to kill the pastor, a man named George Edweu. The Islamic teacher's name

is being withheld for security purposes, but he came to the church with orders to kill the pastor. But God had other plans. Pastor Edweu preached that day on hearing and understanding the voice of God. As that Islamic assassin sat in the church listening to the Gospel he came under conviction of his sin. He rushed to the podium not to kill the pastor but to confess. He said with tears rolling down his cheeks that he had been sent to kill the pastor and destroy the church. But now he wanted to be saved. He repented in front of the congregation and put his faith in Christ. News of the former teacher's conversion shocked the community, and this newly converted man was now on the Islamic hit-list. He had to take his wife and two children into hiding. The Muslim extremist would not rest. They sent another mob to ambush Pastor Edweu to try to get him to tell the whereabouts of the converted Muslim teacher. Local Muslims have even been announcing the conversion of this scholar when they gather at the mosque. "(Name withheld) needs to die for forsaking Islam." Amazing!

So we need to hear it again ... our one, all-consuming passion is to behave in a way that is worthy of that Gospel for which millions around the world are suffering.

Jesus is worth what ever you give up for Him.