Philippians 1:27-2:11 *No Turning Back: Live Worthy of the Gospel*

***Whatever Happens***If you have a Bible, or a Bible-accessing device, I want to invite you to turn to Philippians 1:27. We’re continuing our series from Philippians. The passage I chose today is rather long—we’re going to 2:11—and it contains one of the most famous passages in the New Testament. So we need to dive right into it. I want to walk you through the thought process of the passage, and then I’ll have some observations at the end.

**Philippians 1:27:**

**27**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, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.

The passage starts with Paul saying “whatever happens.” In the original language this was a turn of phrase that literally reads “one thing” or “only this.” It’s Paul’s transition from what he was just talking about to the point he wants to make now. We might say: “bottom line” or “no matter what.” Remember last week? No matter what…Jesus.

So Paul has just been talking about the possibility of his death. He’s been weighing the outcomes: if I live, that’s Christ; if I die, that’s gain. Remember we pictured him thinking out loud, working through the possibilities. But now he’s bringing things back into focus: “whatever happens.” Bottom line.

And what’s the bottom line? “Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” Paul wants to bring it back to us, the readers of this letter. He wants us to focus—no matter what—on living our lives in way that is worthy of the good news of Jesus.

This doesn’t mean that we have to live in a way that deserves the gospel. Paul is no legalist. He’s not saying that we need to live up to an impossible standard of holiness that would make us worthy of Jesus’ death for us. That’s not the gospel. Jesus died for the unworthy. Jesus fulfilled a standard we couldn’t.

But what this does mean is if we are people who have received the grace of Jesus, we should live our lives in a way that reflects the worthiness of that good news. Our lives should be a credit to the difference Jesus makes. Our lives should display the wonderful truth of Jesus. Our conduct should be reflective of the new community we belong to as citizens of Jesus’ kingdom.

This is the big headline that governs this section of the letter. This is the bottom line. Live worthy of the gospel.

How do we do that? The next line mentions two things: we should stand firm, and we should strive together. We should stand firm for the gospel of Jesus, no turning back, no backing down. And we should stand in One Spirit, we should be unified, we should be together.

These two ideas are fleshed out in the rest of the passage.

***Stand Firm***First, stand firm. **Verses 28-30:**

**28**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. **29**For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, **30**since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Paul says there is going to be opposition. There are going to be those who aren’t crazy about Jesus. There are going to those who want you to cool it with Jesus, to go along to get along. It may feel like a struggle at times. There may even be suffering—remember, Paul is in jail as he writes this because of his stand for Jesus.

And Paul’s encouragement and challenge is to stand firm. Stay committed. No turning back.

This is the theme I’ve chosen for our look at Philippians. This is an exhortation that I see throughout the letter. “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (1:6) “Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss…if only I may gain Christ” (3:7 & 8). “Press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us” (3:14)

He says here in verse 28 that when we do that, it is a sign. It’s a sign to those who oppose you that they are missing out on the truth. It’s a sign to other believers that Jesus really is a treasure. So stand firm. Press on. No turning back.

I could say a lot more about these verses, and we’ll keep coming back to this theme, but I want to keep moving, so we can see how Paul develops the second idea.

***Stand Together***Follow the train of thought: we are supposed to conduct ourselves in a matter worthy of the gospel by standing firm, and standing together. As we transition into chapter 2 then, Paul talks about standing together. **Verses 1 and 2:**

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, **2**then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

Notice first of all, the phrase “one in spirit.” Back in verse 27, Paul said that we should “stand firm in one spirit.” That’s the connection, that’s how we know he is still talking about conducting ourselves in a matter worthy of the gospel. Paul is making an appeal to unity in the church. Like-mindedness.

He puts it in terms of “if…then.” It’s an “if…then” argument. If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ… if you are receiving an comfort from his love…if you are experiencing the fellowship of the Spirit (some scholars see hints of the Trinity in those three phrases), if there is any tenderness and compassion in your life because you are a Christian… And clearly, Paul is assuming this is all true. These are the entailments of being a believer. This is what happens when you come to Jesus—you are encouraged, you are loved, you are joined with the Spirit. So Paul says: “If these things are true (and we know they are) then this is what you should do…” If…then.

Paul puts it in terms of his joy. He is a joyful person. This is a joyful letter. But they can really make Paul’s joy complete if they do this thing: be like minded, have the same love, be one in the spirit, be one in purpose.

It’s 4 phrases, but I think it is one thing: Paul is calling for unity. He’s calling for the church to be on the same page. He’s calling for us to think as one. Christians should be united.

Now, I don’t think that we all have to have the exact same thoughts about everything. Billy Graham’s wife Ruth used to say something like “If you and your husband think the same exact thing about everything, one of you is not necessary!”

One of my favorite things about the seminary I attended was that there was a diversity of thought on a lot of things. Among our professors there were different thoughts about modes of baptism, about theories of the end times, about methods of church government, about reformed vs. Arminian theology. There were different ideas, and those differences were not hidden. In fact, our professors would often debate one another in the school chapel on some of these topics.

But on the main things, the big things, there was no disagreement. They were committed to God’s word as the source of truth. They were in agreement about the reality of sin in the world. And, above all, they were unified in their purpose of lifting up the gospel of Jesus.

That’s what Paul is after in verse 2, I think. It’s about an attitude. A mentality of oneness. That’s why he uses the words “like-minded” and “love” and “spirit” and “purpose.” Those are mind-set words. There needs to be a mind-set for unity, a commitment to a shared mission.

In our local congregation that means there is going to be a diversity of thoughts and opinions. We’re not all going to always agree on the best strategies for the church, or have the same responses to current events. We’re not all going to vote the same way in public elections or cheer for the same football teams. And there is room for healthy discussions and even debate.

But Paul is urging us to remain unified in Jesus. To focus on loving each other and staying on mission together no matter what. To remember our common commitment to the main thing and keep the main thing the main thing. And the main thing is the gospel of Jesus.

***You Before Me***That doesn’t mean it is always easy. And it doesn’t mean we’ll always do it perfectly. So now, Paul gives us the attitude we are going to have to have if we are going to make it work. **Verses 3 through 5:**

**3**Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4**not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

**5**In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Again, follow the train of thought: Paul says the bottom line is that we live our lives in a way that reflects the worthiness of the gospel. There we are two things we should do: we should stand firm, and we should stand together. We’ll be talking more about standing firm as we go through the letter, but in chapter 2 he focuses on standing together. He urges us, as people who are experiencing the blessings of Christ, to be unified in love and spirit and purpose. To be like-minded. And that’s tough, so here is what we can do.

These verses give us 3 things to not do, and 3 three things to do. 3 “do nots”. And 3 “do’s.” And it’s all making the same point.

So, do nothing out of “selfish ambition.” That’s thinking only of ourselves. That’s asking “what’s in it for me, me, me, me?”

Or, again, do nothing out of “vain conceit.” That’s an inflated sense of self-importance. It’s the attitude that says “I deserve it. I need it. I’m worth it.”

Or, third, “do not look to your own interests.” There’s an implied “only” there. Do not look only to your own interests. Obviously, you need to take care of yourself. You need to eat. You need shelter. But Paul leaves the “only” out. Because we have a tendency to prioritize our own interests. We have a tendency to take care of ourselves first; and then, maybe, if we have any energy or resources left we consider looking to the interest of others. But that’s not what Paul is calling for.

Instead, Paul calls us to: “in humility value others above yourselves.” Older translations said we were supposed to “consider others better than yourselves.” The English Standard Version says, “count others as more significant than yourselves.” The Christian Standard Bible says, “consider others as more important than yourselves.” The idea is that we put others ahead of ourselves.

That’s the next thing: we are to look “to the interests of the others.” Think of others, and think of others first. This is an attitude that says: “I’m not here to be served, but to serve others.” What do other people need in this situation? What would be best for them?

This is how Christians are supposed to live. The last will be first. Love your neighbor as yourself.

The third thing we are supposed to do? Verse 5: “have the same mindset of Christ Jesus.” Our mindset—remember that, in verse 2? We are to have a mindset that matches that of Jesus.

3 things we shouldn’t do: don’t do things out of selfish ambition, don’t do things out of vain conceit, don’t do things only in our own interest. 3 things we should do: value others ahead of ourselves, look to the interest of others, have the mindset of Christ. 3 Don’ts. 3 Do’s.

But it is all saying the same thing. You before me. Put others first. Lay down your rights in the interests of others.

***The Mindset of Jesus***There’s one more thing in the passage, and it’s probably one of the most famous texts in the entire New Testament. I heard one scholar say that there have probably been more pages written about this passage than any other in the Bible, both in ancient times and today. I’m not sure exactly how you could prove that; but it is one of the richest texts for understanding who Jesus is and what He accomplished in coming to earth. We could easily do an entire sermon series just on these 6 verses; and maybe sometime I will.

But today, I’m not going to spend a lot of time on these familiar words. I just want you to see how Paul fits them into the flow of his argument.

So, again: we are called to live lives worthy of the gospel. And one of the ways we do that is by being unified in spirit and in purpose. That unity can be hard to maintain though, so we need to strive to put others before ourselves. And, if that seems hard to us (and it is) we need to remember the example of Jesus. **Verse 6:**

**6**Who, being in very nature God,  
    did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

Here’s what Jesus did not do. Even though He was, and is, in very nature God; even though He was seated on the throne of heaven; even though He was receiving the praise and adulation of all the heavenly host; even though He—far above any other being who has ever existed—deserves to be put first…Jesus did not consider that position something to be used to his own advantage. He did not set out in selfish ambition or vain conceit. He did not look only to His own interests.

Instead, **verses 7 and 8:**

**7**rather, he made himself nothing  
    by taking the very nature of a servant,  
    being made in human likeness.  
**8**And being found in appearance as a man,  
    he humbled himself  
    by becoming obedient to death—  
        even death on a cross!

This is what Jesus did: He went down, down, down. He humbled Himself. Remember, in humility we are supposed value others above ourselves. He became a servant. He didn’t look for how He could be served, but how He could serve us. He became a human. The creator of the universe took on the existence of His creation. And, more than that, He even subjected Himself to death, even the most humiliating of all deaths, death on the cross.

This is the gospel. This is the good news of Jesus in a nutshell. And it is profound. We could spend weeks upon weeks on these verses.

Just think about it: The creator of humanity took on the nature of humanity and then He subjected Himself to the very worst that humanity could offer. When the soldier formed a fist so that He could strike Jesus, it was the One who created the muscles in his arm that he was striking. When Pilate pronounced the sentence of death on Jesus, it was with the very breath that was given to Him by Jesus that He spoke the words. You get that, right? The people who killed Jesus were only on this planet by the sustaining and maintaining grace of Jesus.

And yet, Jesus went willingly. He went obediently. He could have called 12 legions of angels to come take Him away, but he didn’t do that. Why not? Because it wasn’t His interests He was looking out for, but ours. He went as a servant, giving His life as a ransom for others.

So when Paul calls on us, who have been the benefits of this sacrifice, to put others before ourselves; he’s got a pretty good precedent. This is the mindset of Jesus. It needs to be our mindset as well.

One final thing. Before we conclude that being a Christian is only about debasing ourselves and making ourselves nothing, we need to remember the outcome for Jesus was pretty amazing. **Verses 9-11:**

**9**Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
    and gave him the name that is above every name,  
**10**that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
    in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
**11**and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
    to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus served us, and now He is rightfully exalted as the name that is above every name. Not everyone may acknowledge it now, but the day is coming where no one will be able to deny that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And, the Bible is consistent in saying that those who humble themselves will one day be exalted (Luke 19:11; Luke 18:14). God calls us to humble ourselves like Jesus, so that he may lift us up (1 Peter5:6).

***3 Observations***That’s a quick overview of the passage then. That’s the basic flow and argument. No matter what, Paul wants us to live lives worthy of the gospel. We do that by standing firm in the faith, and by standing together with one spirit. We’ll talk more about standing firm in the faith in the weeks to come, but today we focused on standing together. Paul says the key is to be like-minded; to have a mindset that is committed to unity on the big things even as we discuss and debate everything else. And the key to maintaining that unity is to put others first. To think of others ahead of yourself. Because that’s what Jesus did. That’s the good news that saves us. Jesus looked not to his own interests, but to the interests of others. That’s what Christians do.

So, to wrap up, I want to make three quick observations:

**1. First, we stand firm for the gospel when we stand together.**

I want you to see the connection here. The theme as we go through Philippians is “No Turning Back.” We’re going to see Paul urging us, again and again, to keep moving forward in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

And what I want us to take out of the passage today is the importance of doing that together. The importance of being part of a church. Of working with other believers in the body. Of staying unified in mindset and love and spirt and purpose.

Paul says it is this kind of unity that will make his joy complete. It’s this kind of unity that bears witness to the world. This kind of unity that picks us up when we are discouraged or down.

There is room for different ideas. There is room for discussion and debate. But we must not get distracted from our main purpose, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. Second, what is described for us in this passage is really **the secret sauce for all relationships.**

What Paul is talking about here—you before me—is really the heart of Christianity and it is the key to any successful relationship.

Do you want to know how to have a great marriage? Value your spouse above yourself.

Do you want to know how to be a great parent? Make sure your kids know that you are not looking to your own interests, but to their best interests.

Do you want to be a great neighbor a great co-worker or a great member of the community? Have the mindset of Jesus. Don’t look for how you can be served, but for how you can serve others.

This is the key. This is the secret sauce.

If we start doing this, then the gospel that we proclaim will get a hearing!

This isn’t the way the world works. It’s not what comes natural. Our first instinct is: “What do I want? What will make me happy? What will be the easiest way for me to get my own way?”

But this is the value system of the gospel of Jesus. “The last shall be first and the first shall be last.”

Put yourself last. Put yourself second. And watch your relationships improve.

3. Then, third: **We have to put this into practice.**

I realize that we’ve all heard this before. We all know that we are supposed to treat others the way we want to be treated. We all know that we are supposed to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We all know that selfishness and self-centeredness and self-seeking are bad. We know it, we’ve heard it, we nod along whenever we hear it.

This isn’t new. This isn’t the first time we have heard it.

But the key is, we have to do it. We have to make a conscious effort to put you before me. We have to be intentional about serving others the way Christ serves us. Don’t be one of those people who are so in love with finding a new idea that we act like the old idea has been taken care of. It’s not taken care of just because we have heard it before. It’s not taken care of just because we understand it. It’s not even taken care of just because we wholeheartedly agree that it is a good idea to live this way.

We can’t just talk about it and think about it and agree with it: We have to do it.

We can think about what Jesus did, and we can study the passage about how he emptied himself and came downward for us. We can meditate on it and we can write songs about it and we can talk about it.

But we also have to live it. We have to ask ourselves, who can I serve? Whose interests do I need to start looking out for? How can I—practically and manifestly and habitually—value others ahead of myself?