

READING

Philippians 1: 27-2:11

SERMON

**Being together** (Philippians 1:27-2:11)

Chapter 1 of Philippians ends with these words, taking them from verse 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 one spirit, contending as one person for the faith of the gospel 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. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.** (Philippians 1:27-30 NIV)

What tremendous and challenging words. **Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ** (Philippians 1:27). Whatever happens, whatever happens. I first reread those words several months ago now and they have stuck with me and keep going round and round in my head. Paul has been talking about the problems he has been having with some of the Roman Christians who are preaching the gospel but out of wrong motives. They are preaching the gospel out of jealousy and envy but Paul is ready to die for Jesus, in fact he would prefer to die than live. This is not because he is depressed and wants to end his life, but because he knows that heaven is a far, far better place than earth and he wants to be there; he wants to physically be with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However he knows that God still has a work for him to do on earth because he is still on earth and then he says, **‘Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ’** (Philippians 1:27). And I get the impression that a lot is going on back in Philippi with the Christians there.

There are various wristbands one sees these days or initials that people put on things. In my day, even in Christian circles it seemed less spiritual with initials like S.W.A.L.K. and H.O.L.L.A.N.D., being Sealed With A Loving Kiss and Hope Our Love Lasts And Never Dies. But now we see F.R.O.G., which is Fully Reliant On God and PUSH, Pray Until Something Happens, but always remember that with God the something that happens may involve me doing something. And then there is W.W.J.D., What Would Jesus Do. WWJD is good advice. You could say that it is the modern day version of Paul saying

**Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.**  
(Philippians 1:27 NIV).

**Whatever happens?** But that is hard, surely that is impossible. But that is what it says - **Whatever happens.** That may be alright for Paul, he was a super-Christian, he was next to Jesus, but not me. But we have to remember that Paul was writing not to super-Christians, he was not even writing to the leaders in the church of God at Philippi, but to

**...all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:** (Philippians 1:1 NIV)

He was writing to all the Christians in Philippi so this *inescapable obligation* as one author I read put it is for all. This inescapable obligation to **conduct** ourselves **in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ** and I see this as being as individuals and as a church. This is the call to practical holiness. To be holy one does not mean having to live in a convent or a monastery, our holiness must come out in practical ways. We have to ask the question to ourselves as individuals and as a group what does this mean today in today's culture, in today's society?

One person put it like this in talking about this verse, about practical holiness – he put it as a series of questions

**Will you be watchful and prayerful? (PAUSE)**

**Will you renounce the life of self-will, and entirely live for your Lord's glory and glory? (PAUSE)**

**Will you particularly surrender to a certain temptation, to jealousies and divisions? (PAUSE)**

**Will you recollect that Christ is so committed...to you that he came into the world so that it is the "only" thing in life, after all, in the last resort, to be *practically* true to Him? (PAUSE)** (H.C.G. Moule in *Philippian Studies* page 81)

I wonder how we would live up to that? Certainly hard questions and in reality we know that the answer is, 'No'. But that can be so depressing and also be used as an excuse. As Christians we must change. As we allow the Holy Spirit to work on us and in us, he will change us – but we need to be open to his challenges, to his voice, to him changing us. We too have our side of the bargain – God will change us when we want to change, as we grow more in knowledge and depth of insight as Paul mentions in verse 9 of this first chapter.

**And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,** (Philippians 1:9 NIV)

Paul was specifically talking about love, but he still wants them to grow in knowledge and insight and maybe the love was what they needed to know more and more at that time.

Equally though we must not make the fact that we say it is too hard for me, for us to live up to this ideal of what Paul says

**Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ** (Philippians 1:27 NIV)

Just because we find it impossible to do that does not make it an excuse not to try. Paul makes the statement as if the listeners to the letter will follow what he says. Jesus always told his disciples to follow his commands and never added anything to that statement like 'if you are able or can manage it'. Yes we do fail, but that does not give us an excuse to not be with God in the changes he is wanting to make with us, within us. And when we fail, we ask for his forgiveness and repent and ask that he will help us to not fail again and God will forgive us and God will help us.

As I said, I get the feeling that not all is happy at the Philippian church. Paul in this letter has said in verse 3 of chapter 1

**I thank my God every time I remember you.** (Philippians 1:3 NIV)

And has then gone on

- to talk about wanting their love to grow more and more
- to talk about the problems he is experiencing in the church of God at Rome with factions trying to stir up trouble for him
- to then talk about whatever happens, remember how Jesus would react

He then goes on as we shall see in subsequent weeks to

- hold Timothy and Epaphroditus up as models, as examples
- and later on he speaks of a dispute between two women in the church at Philippi after having worked with them

All is not well at Philippi and so he moves from asking the people to live lives that bring glory and praise to God, into chapter 2, a chapter that begins with a plea for unity.

**If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:** (Philippians 2:1-5 NIV)

Should we be surprised that there are problems, that there seem to be dissension and internal divisions in Rome and in Philippi? We have to remember that although Paul is talking about a church and writing to a church and that the church is populated with saints, that those saints are still sinners. We are still sinners and therefore there is the likelihood of division, of internal separations, of dissension.

So Paul says they should Be Together in Self-Forgetfulness. Paul says we should have a

- **Being Together in Like-mindedness** – this is that we have the same truth, to be of the same persuasion, the same opinion. Paul was telling the different factions in the church that they need to forget their little differences and stress the common things they share, that they have in Jesus. The fact that Jesus came, he died for them and then he rose again so that they could know forgiveness of sin and a relationship with God. Most factions are caused by small issues, differences in taste and style and not the central message of the gospel.
- **Being Together in Love** – also Jesus preached a gospel of love, but if his followers, if his saints are tearing each other apart, then where is God's love within us. How can a church show the love of God if that church is into backbiting, into moaning about others within the church, is into gossip and rumours? This is not to mean that all will be sweetness and light within the church - I and Paul are not that naive, but we have to work at our relationships together both as individuals one to another and also as groups within the church. Jesus said in Matthew 18

**"If your sister or brother sins against you, go and show them their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won your fellow-Christian over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they refuse to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.** (Matthew 18:15-17 NIV)

The law of least publicity, but so often we moan to others whom we think will be similar in thinking to us about someone else or about another group and before you know where you are, there are two factions at war, covertly, with each other but one side however, may be blissfully ignorant of the grievances that the others hold. If Being Together in Like-Mindedness is talking about truth, then Being Together in the Same Love – the love of God that took Jesus from heaven to the cross – means that we have to talk to each other face to face and not about each other behind backs. And if we are not heard or feel we are not heard the first time, then take someone else, not a whole gang of people, to talk through the issue again.

This also means that we have to be ready to meet with people to talk through issues with them and not run away from things. But that is hard. On a mediation course I went on, the first exercise was to stand in a line where one end was those who *ran from situations* and the other end was those who *confronted situations*. I was in turmoil. My natural instinct so often is to run, to not deal with the issue. However I have found over the years that if you keep sweeping the rubbish under the carpet, that after a while you fall over the mound of rubbish, so I know and feel that sorting things out is best. In the end I walked up and down the line.

We must be those who deal with situations, but in the right way. We do it in truth and in love, not to attack, not to get my own way.

- **Being Together in Purpose** – and the final Being Together is that of the same purpose. The difficulty is that the words in verse 2 of mind and purpose are virtually the same and the word translated as spirit in the NIV or accord in other versions are really saying similar things. We are to be together in purpose and Paul is driving this home by repeating words relating to being like-minded, similar minded, same heart, etc and our purpose must be to be Christ-like.

In our dealings with each other we need to be asking ourselves the question,

### **What Would Jesus Do?**

If our attitude is as Paul says in verse 5

**Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:** (Philippians 2:5 NIV)

Then as Paul says in verse 4

**Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.** (Philippians 2:4 NIV)

This is the Being together of Self-Forgetfulness – the attitude of Jesus. But what is the attitude of Christ Jesus? To give up everything, and then to give up his life for each and everyone of us. That's what Paul tells us in the glorious hymn of praise from verses 6 to 11. What is the attitude of Jesus and then the attitude of the Father when that attitude is shown?

**Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.**

**And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!**

**Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** (Philippians 2:6-11 NIV)

And what will be the result in a church when we exercise this attitude? Chapter 1:27 beginning halfway through

**I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one person for the faith of the gospel 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.** (Philippians 1:27-28 NIV)

We will be together, helping each other not to be afraid when we are opposed.

And it means that it gives us more confidence to take WWJD out into the world. Whatever happens, is written in a church context, so whatever happens at church we are to say to ourselves WWJD – What Would Jesus Do, but we also need to transpose that into our everyday Christian living. So this week at work, at home, whatever comes up just say to oneself WWJD – What Would Jesus Do. How am I to react in this situation? What is going to bring God most glory? What Would Jesus Do?

**Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.**  
(Philippians 1:27 NIV)

PRAYER