

Philippians 1:27-30

The Courage that Springs From Faith

...*in nothing terrified by your adversaries* – v. 28

We've seen in the course of our studies the confidence of Paul. He was confident that the work begun in the Philippians would be perfected (v. 6) and he was confident that the gospel was being furthered even though it might not seem like it to the fleshly eye. Paul was desirous that the Philippians share this confidence with him so we find him saying to them in v. 12 *But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.*

Paul was also confident that even though he would just as soon depart and be with Christ which would be far better he would, nevertheless, have occasion to see them again and to minister to them again for the joy and furtherance of their faith. See how he expresses this confidence in v. 25 *And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith.*

This joy and confidence that Paul has not in himself or in the saints at Philippi, but this joy and confidence that he has in Christ and that he has in the gospel of Christ leads to the first exhortation of the chapter which we looked at last week. It's found in v. 27 *Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.*

Let the gospel of Christ govern your life – that's what Paul is saying in effect. This gospel that has brought salvation to your soul and has conveyed to you the assurance of heaven – this gospel which has taught you the love of Christ for sinners who deserve the wrath of Christ – let this gospel be the ruling power in your heart so that the gospel of Christ becomes the driving force behind everything you do and say and think. And you may recall how I pointed out that the word *conversation* pertains to all that a Christian says or does or thinks. *Let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ. Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ* (NAS).

You could say that Paul is calling upon the Philippians to persevere in the faith. This is the meaning of the later part of v. 27 which makes reference to *standing fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*. Walking worthy, standing fast, and striving together for the faith of the gospel. These phrases describe Christian perseverance. Or you could say they describe the constancy of the Christian's faith.

When you come to v. 28 Paul is adding something to this notion of the constancy of faith. He is dealing now with the courage of faith. Look at what he says in v. 28 *And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.*

In nothing terrified by your adversaries – This is another one of those statements that leads you to marvel at the power of God in Paul's life. You can't help but notice when you follow the Apostle Paul through the book of Acts that everywhere he went he met strong resistance and confronted terrible adversaries. I've been reminding you throughout these

studies in Philippians that this was a letter that Paul wrote from jail. The Philippians would also have remembered the fact that when Paul first came to Philippi he was put in jail. His adversaries became very provoked when he cast a demon out of a young damsel in Acts 16. And so we read in that chapter beginning with v. 22 *And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. 23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: 24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.* You can certainly see in these verses the intensity of the animosity against Paul.

On another occasion Paul was stoned and left for dead. On yet another occasion when he arrived in Jerusalem the Jews apprehended him and shut the doors of the temple and then went about to kill him (Acts 21:31). He was rescued on that occasion by the Roman soldiers and was given permission to address the very crowd that had tried to kill him. And when he got to that part of his sermon that had to do with taking the gospel to the Gentiles we're told in Acts 22:22 that they *lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.*

These scenes are the ones to keep in mind, then, when Paul makes the statement in Phil. 1:28 that the believer, while he walks in a manner worthy of the gospel and while he stands fast and while he strives for the faith of the gospel he does so *in nothing terrified by your adversaries.* We can certainly recognize in Paul that while he was confident and while he was joyful he was also fearless. In all of these episodes I've described he was certainly in nothing terrified by his adversaries. And as this statement suggests, the believer should be fearless also. You and I are to be in nothing terrified by the adversaries of the gospel and Christ.

The thing we need to consider, therefore, is how does the Christian do this? How does the Christian manifest this kind of courage in his faith? This is the question I want to try to answer this morning as we consider the theme of:

Obtaining the Courage that Accompanies Faith

How does the Christian obtain that courage?

Consider with me first of all that before you obtain anything you must see the need for it. So think with me first on:

I. The Need for Obtaining the Courage of Faith

I've been describing some of the situations that Paul encountered to set the stage for showing you that Paul was in nothing terrified by his adversaries. But as vv. 29,30 clearly show us Paul was not unique in the adversity he bore. Look at what vv. 29,30 say:

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; 30 Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me. Do you see what Paul is saying? – he’s saying that the saints at Philippi were in the same conflict that he, Paul, was engaged in. He doesn’t suggest for a moment that his own conflict was somehow unique or unusual for him and that the Christians at Philippi should not expect the same things to happen to them. They were in the same conflict – they were facing the same adversaries – they could expect the same kinds of things to happen to them. Indeed these things are given in the behalf of Christ. It is given to the believer to believe and it is given to him to suffer.

And this is the consistent testimony of the New Testament. So when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians he said to them in 2Thess. 1:4 *So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure.* There were times in the course of Paul’s ministry that this truth of affliction and tribulation made him anxious with regard to the state of the people to whom he had preached the gospel.

In the case of the church at Thessalonica we’re told in Acts 17 that the brethren had sent Paul and Silas away by night because of the hostility that had erupted toward the gospel. In his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul shares with them how anxious he was for them because of his hasty departure.

Listen to these words from 1Thess 3:1ff *Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; 2 And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: 3 That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. 4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. 5 For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.*

Paul goes on to write in that epistle how thrilled he was when he learned from Timothy that their faith had held. In the power of the gospel they had gained the courage that accompanies faith and they were in nothing terrified by their adversaries.

And what Paul asserts in his epistles we also find Christ saying during his earthly ministry. Jn. 15:18ff *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. 19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. 20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. 21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me.*

In this statement by Christ we’re taught not only to expect the same kind of treatment that Christ received (and that Paul received and that those early Christians received) but

we're also taught why we should expect such treatment. It springs from the natural man's hatred of Christ and it springs from the fact that a lost world doesn't know God.

We can be thankful this morning that we are not exposed to the kind of hostility that those early Christians knew. We have not been forced to flee from our homes. We have not been committed to prison. We certainly do see, however, that we live in a culture that is hostile to Christ and hostile to all that is in keeping with Christ's word. Our science is hostile to the doctrine of creation. Our fine arts culture is dedicated to expressions of sin and immorality. Our political culture is dedicated to sanctioning sin and portraying the sanctity of life as a war against women. And those that think otherwise try to step softly through the issue and try to shift the discussion to a different issue.

And doesn't our text this morning run contrary to what a large part of our Christian culture, so called propagates? How many are led to believe that the Christian life should be an easy life? You are, after all, in the realm of God's favor. Shouldn't you expect to have health and wealth? Doesn't God love you? And if he does love you shouldn't he give you nice things and shouldn't he provide for you mild winds that make for smooth sailing in life? It didn't take long for me to find this Joel Osteen quote: *God's want us to prosper financially, to have plenty of money, to fulfill the destiny he has laid out for us.*

What a contrast to the way Paul lived and to the experiences of those early Christians. What a contrast to the words of our text that set before us the reality of spiritual adversaries. But if your focus is on the things of this world then you won't rise to the challenge of obtaining the courage that accompanies faith. You'll be too focused on a different challenge. You'll be aiming and striving for what this world can give you. And in so doing you may be building on the sand rather than on the rock of Christ.

There is, then, a challenge that must be taken up – it's the challenge of courage and it's a challenge that recognizes the hostility of the world to Christ and to the gospel of Christ. It's a challenge that acknowledges the truth that the Christian faces many spiritual adversaries that would rob him and suppress him and seek to intimidate him against living for Christ or standing for Christ or speaking for Christ.

Why do you find it hard to speak for Christ? It certainly must be to some degree your knowledge of terrifying adversaries. May we rise to the challenge, then, of obtaining the courage of faith that will enable you to say *in nothing terrified by my adversaries*. Having seen, then, something of the need for obtaining the courage, let's consider next:

II. The Means for Gaining This Courage

When you look at Paul's own list of sufferings and afflictions found in 2Cor. 11 it magnifies his courage all the more. 2Co 11:25 *Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep.* And yet this is the man who is telling us to be *in nothing terrified by your adversaries*.

How did Paul reach such a summit of courage – and how do we begin to reach such a summit? I think the key here is found in the study we did a couple of weeks ago. We have

to go back to v. 21 and see again Paul's philosophy of life and death. *For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.* I borrowed a lot from Lloyd-Jones when we did that study but I don't know if I pointed out what he said about what Paul means by living. *What, then, does he mean by life?* Lloyd-Jones asks. *He means the supreme thing in life, the thing for which and by which he lives, the thing without which life would to him be pointless and meaningless. He means the thing that controls the whole of his life. Perhaps the best way of putting it is like this: the thing that Paul is really saying about himself is that he is in love with Christ. He loves him and, as is always true of love, that love dominates his life and controls it.*

For to me to live is Christ – which means, then, that Paul lives in the power of Christ's love – to live, to truly live, to live life and draw from it all that God means for you to have from it is to love – and not just to love but to love Christ – and not just to love Christ but to love him in the awareness of how great his love is for you.

John, in his first epistle, makes the connection for us between this kind of love and the courage of faith when he writes in 1Jo 4:18 *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.* I could have used this verse, I suppose, in my previous point which dealt with the challenge of obtaining the courage of faith. But I refer to the verse now because it tells us plainly how the challenge can be met.

If you would increase your courage you must increase your love. *Perfect love casteth out fear.* This really lifts the whole matter out of the realm of sheer determination doesn't it? How often the Christian stumbles by thinking his progress is determined by the strength of his will. I don't negate the Christian's strength of resolve. Indeed we'll have cause to focus on it more when we get to 2:13 the point I'm making now, however, is that it is not by relying on the strength of our wills that we'll gain the courage to be in nothing terrified by our adversaries. The Apostles, Peter especially, thought before Christ's crucifixion that by sheer determination they would stand by Christ even to the death and yet a short time later they were scattered, terrified by the adversaries you could say.

But on the Day of Pentecost Peter and the others were fearless and before the Jewish council they were fearless and even when warned and beaten they were fearless. And the reason for their courage is traceable to their understanding of Christ's love in the gospel. They understood that Christ didn't die defeated by his adversaries but Christ died making atonement for their sins and thus paved the way for them to know everlasting life in heaven in the presence of the One who loved them and gave himself for their sins.

He gave himself for me – this is why Paul would write *for to me to live is Christ.* Christ gave himself for me. And because he gave himself for me he has secured heaven for me – this is why Paul could write that *to die is gain.* So perfect love casts out fear and as the author of Hebrews states in Heb. 2:14,15 *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he*

might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

I suppose you could really boil the matter down to that well known passage in Romans 8 where Paul elaborates on how nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. *For I am persuaded*, he writes in v. 38 – and there’s the key – being persuaded. *For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

If you are persuaded of Christ’s love the way Paul was persuaded of it – persuaded that nothing can separate you from it – persuaded that no circumstances in life and not even death itself can separate you from it then you will attain the courage that the text presents – *in nothing terrified by your adversaries.*

This month of October is Reformation Month and we love to think during this month of the great Reformers – Luther and Calvin and Zwingli and Knox. Luther was certainly fearless before his adversaries. He captures the sentiment of what I’ve been describing in the 3rd stanza of his hymn: A Mighty Fortress is Our God:

And though this world, with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.
The Prince of Darkness grim – We tremble not for him; His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure, One little word shall fell him.
That word above all earthly powers, No thanks to them abideth,
The Spirit and the gifts are ours Through Him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go, This mortal life also; The body they may kill:
God’s truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever.

So we obtain the courage of faith by growing in the love of Christ. The same truth is conveyed by Christ himself in the last beatitude he gives in the sermon on the mount. There’s some disagreement among commentators as to whether or not there are 8 or 9 beatitudes. I think there are 8 and the last one is repeated by Christ to make it a point of emphasis.

Mt 5:10 *Blessed [are] they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* And then in the following verses Christ becomes even more direct. Up to v. 10 in the beatitudes the formula is most often *Blessed are they*. *Blessed are the poor in Spirit; Blessed are they that mourn; Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake.* And then when you get to v. 11 it’s as if Christ is looking at each individual in his audience and speaking directly to them when he says *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

The formula in the beatitudes also shows us something of the way to obtain the courage of faith. What is Christ saying in each beatitude? He's saying that the true subjects of the kingdom of heaven are blessed. And there's the key – knowing that you are blessed. If you know that you're blessed then you're ready to face whatever the world and the powers of darkness hurl at you. You're ready to say with Luther – *Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also.*

So you obtain the courage that accompanies faith by growing in your knowledge of and appreciation for the love of Christ. That actually makes the challenge not only obtainable but desirable. You're not so much focused on the terror of your adversaries as you're focused on Christ himself.

And I think I should point out here that it's precisely at this point that too many Christians fall short of the goal of obtaining the courage of faith. They're focused so much on all that's wrong in the world. Look at the abysmal state of the nation, they say. Look at the terrible laws that our rulers make. Look at how ineffective our politicians are when it comes to representing our values. Look at the extent of compromise and apostasy in the church.

And while I'm not suggesting that we should be oblivious to all that's going on around us, I would say that I don't want to look at those things. I certainly don't want to look at them to such a degree that they dominate my heart and mind. If you're focused primarily on those things then you will be intimidated by the terror of Christ's adversaries. You will be downcast and discouraged and pessimistic.

Can I give you a little bit of political advice as we are coming up very shortly to a major election? I don't think I'll be in trouble with the IRS for this because I'm not going to endorse a candidate or tell you who to vote for. I'm going to suggest, rather, that you strive to see with the eye of faith the One who sits on the throne before whom the nations are as a drop in the bucket and are counted as the small dust of the balance (Isa. 40:15).

If you'll make him who loved you and gave himself for you the focus of your faith then you won't be shaken by the outcome of this election. There's a sense in which any way you cut it the outcome is going to be abysmal. We're either going to continue down a path of socialism or we're going to give a certain credence to a cult or we can even end up doing both by electing a Mormon who will continue to grow the government and take the nation deeper into debt.

If your focus is on Christ and you're persuaded that nothing can separate you from his love and you believe that you are bountifully blessed in him then you'll walk worthy of the gospel and you'll stand fast in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel *and in nothing terrified by your adversaries which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.*

May the Lord, then, direct your hearts into the love of Christ that you may indeed gain the courage that accompanies faith. (III. – The Message Conveyed by Courage).