



Sermon – March 8, 2020
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Verses Covered This Week

Ephesians 1:27 - 30

There we go. I flipped it the wrong way apparently. So this would go to explain what Bill so eloquently said, which is I do not have a doctorate. And unfortunately for you, I did not stay at a Holiday Inn Express last night. So but praise the Lord that God does not take Spring Break, nor is His clock messed up by springing forward. And so I hope you have come this morning hungry to meet with the Lord. Hungry to hear from the Lord. Hungry to come to His table to take part in His word and to heed what He says. We are in an interesting time in the life of our church. It was just a little over a month ago that we celebrated where we're been. That we have fought long and hard about the legacy that God has given our church. In a few short weeks, we will come together to discern from the Lord and then celebrate what seems God may be doing. It's an interesting time in the life of our church. The last time that we faced this as a church body, Ronald Reagan was two years into his second presidential term in office. At home, we were reeling from the Challenger disaster. And abroad the Soviet Union was dealing with Chernobyl. The number one movie in America was Top Gun. Most households did not have a personal computer and the internet was not in any kind of vocabulary. Star Wars only had one trilogy to its name. And I wasn't born. We are in an interesting time in the life of our church. We have celebrated the unbelievable legacy that God has given us. The thousands upon thousands, and truly without exaggeration, the tens of thousands of students that have come through this church that have gone out. Those who are serving as pastors, as ministers, as seminary professors, and missionaries. Those who fill everything from corporate boardrooms to hospitals to civil services to school classrooms and everything in between. God has granted us an unbelievable legacy where disciples have been made. And there is an excitement and a buzz at wondering at dreaming at praying, "God what do You have for the future?" But here's the question. It's far too easy to live on yesterday's legacy or to get caught up in what tomorrow could be and miss the fact, does God have a call today for us as a church body. And the answer is a resounding, yes. There is a call that echoes from the mouth of God sitting on His glorious throne, from eternity past to eternity future that comes to us today. And so if you've got your Bibles, would you take them and turn to Philippians chapter 1. Philippians chapter 1.

We're going to pick up here in a moment in verse 27. Let me just tell you about the church in Philippi. This is a church that has a rich legacy. This is the first church in Europe. The first

converts in Europe formed the first church. We see that in Acts 16. They were quick to follow the Lord. They were quick to pick up the ministry. They were quick to make disciples. We see the beginning of chapter 1, Paul is thankful for them because they have, unlike any other church in Paul's ministry, the Philippians have partnered with him in taking the gospel. They have ministered to Him. It's a church with a rich legacy. It's a church with a bright future. We watch Paul say, "I am confident that He who started a good work will bring it to completion." Paul writes in verse 22, he says, "I am confident that I am coming back to you because God's work isn't finished." Paul is unbelievably confident in Christ for their future. But Paul, while thankful for the legacy and confident in the future, that is not what he focuses on. Instead, he says this. Verse 27 of chapter 1.

²⁷Only, solely, of greatest of supreme importance, only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear that I will hear that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one heart, one soul, one mind, contending together for the faith of the gospel; ²⁸in no way alarmed by your opponents – which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that, from God. ²⁹For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

He writes them and he says, "Only this one thing above anything else of greatest importance, there's one thing that I want to hear. One thing that I want to see. And that is this. That you live out your citizenship well." It is an interesting little word. My Bible translates it, conduct yourselves in a manner. Yours may say, live out your citizenship. The word is an interesting little word. It comes from the Greek root word for city and it's a word that's only used twice in all of the New Testament. And this is the only place where it's used, of the two uses, where it's used as a command. Paul writes it as a present tense command, meaning this is not something we do once. This is something we do moment by moment every day. He puts it in the middle voice. Which I'm not a grammarian, but you have to learn to be to study Scripture. Here's what the middle voice means. This is not something someone does to me; it's something I myself must make a choice to do. And it is an imperative. Meaning this is not a casual suggestion, but a divine command from the very throne of God. The word means quite literally, to know the rights and responsibilities you have as a citizen and to carry them out faithfully and well. And it's an interesting word that Paul uses because this is not normally how Paul describes the Christian walk. He would use the word live out your walk; walk well. In fact, that's what you see in the other of his epistles. But here with the Philippians, he uses this word. And there's a reason. Because Philippi was unique in the Roman Empire. Now I'm not sure how much history you know of Philippi or if you got that in your high school history classes, but let me just fill you in. Philippi was unique because it was on the fields of Philippi that Mark Antony and Octavian defeated the forces of Cassius and Brutus in 42 A.D. Those who betrayed Caesar. It's on the plains of Philippi that this battle happens. Because of this, they set up a colony there and many retired soldiers and veterans moved there. And shortly after this, the colony of Philippi was given and granted full Roman citizenship. Because if you lived in the Roman Empire, you may be a Roman citizen in the way that we think of it, right. You're under the government of Rome, so therefore you're a citizen. That's not how it worked. You were not a Roman citizen unless you lived in Rome, of Roman descent, or you happened to be given it in some kind of a unique way, like the colony of Philippi. If you were not a citizen, you had no rights. And that

might be hard for us to understand in modern geo-political world where even those who aren't citizens, those who are guests, those who are in there, are certain rights we try to protect. You did not have that in the Roman Empire. So the right to vote, the right to stand for office, the right to make legal contracts and own private property, the right to have an official marriage, the right to immunity from some taxes, the right to sue, the right to legal trade, the right to appeal to a higher court, and in that being protected from the worst and harshest forms of punishment that could be handed out, including crucifixion. You had the right for death sentences to be reduced to simply exiles. You had the right to appeal directly to Caesar. To have Roman citizenship gave you unbelievable rights and came with it, responsibilities to protect and walk out Rome. We get this. This is not unusual.

As Americans, we have rights and responsibilities. You exercised some of them Tuesday if you went and voted. We're proud. America is proud. It always is interesting when you hear people who live overseas. I had a missionary student who lived in England and he said, "Yeah, any time I get on the subway and I see American tourists, I change my accent because American tourists are loud and proud." Americans love America. Of that, we're Texans. Texans love our state. We have a fascinating state that we're proud of. In fact, most of us would say we're Texans before we'd say we're Americans. And more specifically here, we get this because we live around a university that is known for its rich tradition and commitment. And Aggies don't lie, steal, or cheat, or tolerate those who do. We understand this word. That when you are identified as part of a group, there are rights and responsibilities that come with it. And what Paul says to the church in Philippi is he says, "Conduct yourselves, live out your citizenship worthy." But to what is he referring? He's not referring to being good Roman citizens. He's saying, live out your true citizenship. Your citizenship that in chapter 3 he will say, "You are citizens of heaven." You see, for you and I, we are not primarily Americans. We are not Texans. We're not Aggies. If you are in this room and you are in Christ, then you and I are sons and daughters of God. We are co-heirs with Christ. We are filled with the Spirit. Our citizenship is in heaven and we are ambassadors of the New Jerusalem that is coming. And there is a way of life that is befitting a son and daughter of God whose citizenship lies in heaven. And that is what Paul calls us to in this moment. To walk worthy. To take the rights and responsibilities that you and I have been given as children of God. And to walk in a manner that is suitable of one who has been given those rights and responsibilities. This is by no means an exhausted list, but I tried to just come up with a small list of what are our rights and responsibilities. One, we have the right to be children of God. But as many received Him, to them He gave the right to become of children of God. How do we become children of God? Because we have the right to adoption. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption by which we cry out, "Abba, Father!" And in Rome, a biological child could be disinherited for any reason. But an adopted child could not be disinherited for any reason. And I have been adopted by the blood of Christ. I have the right to boldly approach, Hebrews 4, we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who's tempted in all things as we are yet without sin. So in light of this, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace. The right to an intercessor. Romans 8, the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit Himself intercedes with us with groanings too deep for words. He intercedes for us according to the will of God. A few verses later, it says; who is the one who condemns Christ Jesus who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, also intercedes for us. 2 Corinthians 1, verse 20 says: as many are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; because He is our Amen.

We have the right to all of the promises of God in Christ. We have unbelievable rights. Are you confident of the rights you have? Do you know the rights you have in Christ? And understand that those rights are not rights because you and I feel them, they're rights because the blood of Christ says they are true. We have responsibilities. 1 Peter 1 says this: you shall be holy, as I am holy. So as obedient children, do not be conformed to your former lusts which were yours in ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy in all your behavior.

We have a responsibility to live out the holiness God has given us. We have a responsibility, he'll say later on in the next chapter, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We have a responsibility to work out our salvation as it is God who is working in us. Ephesians 4, we have a responsibility to submit to the Spirit so that the unity of the Spirit will pervade through us. We have a responsibility to be built up for ministry, also in Ephesians 4, we have a responsibility to take the gifts God has given us, the spiritual giftings, and use them in the body. 1 Corinthians 12: but each one is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Galatians 2 says we have a responsibility to bear each other's burdens. Matthew 28 says this: that you and I have a responsibility to go and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Teaching them to observe all that He has commanded us and behold He is with us to the end.

We have rights and we have responsibilities that God has given us. The question is, do we embrace them? The question is, what do I deem is worthy? And if I look into my life and I find that there is some portion of my life where I am not suitably rightly walking in the rights and responsibilities that I have been given as a citizen of heaven, then it means that I have deemed me and my pleasures as more worthy than the King. We have rights and responsibilities to live as citizens of heaven. But Paul hones in on a very specific aspect. He says, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel." And here's what he picks up on. That whether I'm there or whether I'm absent, that I will see or that I will hear that you are standing firm in one spirit. That you are standing firm. That you are resolutely planted and unwavering in where you stand. It's a military term that speaks of soldiers who refuse to leave their posts regardless of the battle around them. Perhaps one of the best visuals are the ruins at Pompeii. Where there are soldiers in full military gear still standing their posts even though they've been buried in ash. He says, "I want to hear that you are standing firm, that you are not stepping back, that you are rooted firmly in the face of all opposition. That you remain where you should be." But it's not just that you remain; it's that we remain in one spirit. Now some of your Bibles may capitalize spirit, some may keep it lowercase. Here's what's meant there. It's a phrase literally in one spirit. And it's the idea that you and I would have a unity of purpose. That there would be a unity of purpose in us as a body, standing firm, unwavering. That as the world, as culture, as the enemy lob missiles that rain down against our shields of faith that we don't step back; that we stand firm. That we stand firm in one purpose.

Now what is that purpose? Look with me. He's going to define this command. He's going to define it. He's going to flesh it out in two ways, two sides. He says, first, that with one spirit we are striving or contending, we are battling together for the faith of the gospel. So here's the first side of what does it mean to stand firm. To live as a citizen worthy of heaven, specifically here, that means to stand firm in one purpose. So what does this mean? That we are contending. He switches. He switches from military language to athletic language. It's a word that means to

contend, to move, to struggle, to contest. It's the idea, a picture in your mind, any kind of contact sport. Picture in your mind a football game. Picture in your mind, just pick a sport and you watch that team fighting, striving, pushing hard. But it's not just that word contending. It's not just that we're striving, but we're with one, and the phrase literally is with one soul, with one life. That we are moving as one. There's, and again this is going to be an absolute horrible reference, I apologize to all of you who haven't seen this movie, but I think you'll get the picture. *Mighty Ducks 2*. They're training for the junior Olympic games and they bring on these other players and they're not unified. And so the coach takes all of the players on the team, there's about 15. They're in their pads, they're in their skates, they're on the ice and the coach ties a giant rope around all of them. And he says, "You have to now skate around the rink." Of course the problem is, they all start going every which direction and they can't move and they keep falling. And the point was they had to learn how to become of one heart, of one mind, of one life, and move as one. That's what the command is here. That you and I to stand firm in one purpose means that you and I come together as the body of Christ. That there is one life, there is one soul, and we move, that we contend. And what are we contending for? We're contending for the faith of the gospel. We're not simply trying to take a defensive posture that says, "Well, I'll stand firm and believe what's true." No. We are seeking to go out to take the message of hope, the message of the gospel, that Jesus has come, that He has died in our place, that He has risen, that there is hope, there is life, there is restoration to what you and I and every other human being has been made for. To sit at God's table, to look Him in the eyes as a son and as a daughter. Whatever human hearts cries out for, we are to contend and to strive. It's for the proclamation of the gospel. And just, I did some numbers. I work with our college students, obviously. There's about 80,000 college students in our city. If you were to be, and some of you've heard me use this, if we were to naively assume that on *Breakaway's* largest night, which is usually the beginning of the year, that every student who shows up knows Christ personally, then we would assume there's about 10,000 students who know Christ. Realize what that means. There are 70,000 18 to 23 year olds in this city who do not know Jesus Christ. We have around 7,000 international students and at least 7 of the top 10 countries that we receive students from, it is illegal to be a Christian in. Yet most of these students will live their entire time in the states and never step foot inside the home of an American. The lostness among our college students is great. But I went even bigger and I said, "How many people live in Brazos County?" Well, it's estimated there's about 230,000 people living in Brazos County. Now I'll spare you how I came up with this figure, but I began to process through as far as the Bible believing, gospel-centered, gospel-proclaiming churches in town, how many people are showing up for worship on a weekly basis. Came up with about 15,000. That means lest we think that we live in a reached community, that means more, that means about 1 out of every 11 people you come in contact with, only 1 knows Christ. Church family, we have a vast mission field at our front door. And we haven't even talked about, we've only talked about our Jerusalem, not our Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. And God has not called the pastor of the church to reach the community. He has called us, the body. He has called you, the kids in this room, He's called you to contend for the faith of the gospel in your schools. Students, as you go out this week in the Jerusalem Project, He's called you to contend in one life for the sake of the gospel. College students, He's called you. Single adults, married adults, parents of children, empty nesters, couples without children, young adults, legacy adults; He has called us. It is His call to us to go out and reach. So when was the last time that we shared the gospel? Let me ask what I asked our students last week. When was the last time we even prayed about an open door to share the gospel? When was the last time I paid enough attention to who my neighbor is or who my co-

worker is to realize they don't know Christ and I have been on my knees praying hard for their salvation? See I worry many of us we don't do it, but even bigger than that, we don't even desire to do it. Because we have lost sight of standing firm with one purpose. Instead, perhaps, we come and we believe the purpose of the church and the purpose of God is to make me feel better. Perhaps the purpose of God is to guide me through hard decisions instead of realizing that the purpose of God and us as a church is to go out in one life. And we can't go out in unity, listen, there is not unity because we simply come together and act nice and say we agree. That is not biblical unity. In fact, the phrase unity, it's unity of the Spirit, meaning unity which only the Holy Spirit can produce.

So how do we as a body be a unified body? When you and I as individuals submit to the Holy Spirit. Submit to His word, to His ways, to His will. When you and I as an individual submit to the Spirit, and when I do that and when you do that, what the Spirit does is he brings unity. And in one life, we contend, we struggle side by side for the faith of the gospel because this is what it means to stand firm with one purpose. But it's not just contending for the faith of the gospel, look in verse 28: in no way alarmed, in no way startled. It's a word that refers to a group of horses that are spooked and run off. In no way spooked, in no way allowing yourself to be intimidated by your opponents. For those in Philippi, they lived in a city that was passionately Roman. Everything about the culture of Philippi would have been in opposition to the culture of heaven. It would have been a culture of great sexuality. It would have been a culture of emperor worship in the highest. It would have been a culture that did not care for the poor. It would have been a culture that was all about Rome. In every way opposite a culture that's all about Christ. Likely the Philippians would have faced mob violence as Christ took hold, as they stood firm, as they took hold of the rights and responsibilities of heaven, as the holiness changed their lives, and they walked in a new way. As they reached out to the poor, as they took the gospel and they contended side by side together in one life, one soul, one heart going out. They would have faced mob opposition. And make no mistake, church family, when we as a church family submit to the Spirit and we as a church family rise up in the unity that the Spirit gives, when you and I as a church family choose to stand firm on the word of God not willing to move an inch, when we are united in one purpose to go out and contend side by side for the gospel, make no mistake, we will face opposition. It is going to happen. There is no way around it. And the command here, the part of standing firm means that when it's happened, we don't act surprised or scared or startled. We don't go, "Oh no! What did I do wrong?" We don't, when we make a choice to follow Christ, when we make a choice to stand for what's correct, we don't walk out and go, "Wow, this loneliness that I feel because I won't go out with my co-workers and engage in behavior unbecoming a follower of Christ, this loneliness. What's wrong?" Nothing's wrong. You're following Christ. Whenever you reach out, when others look at you and go, "Why on earth, why on earth would you not have your children in every possible sports activity? Why would you ever choose to put limits, especially limits so that they can be a part of the church body? Why would you choose to not take your finances and use them all upon yourself? Why would you give? Why would you take a Compassion child and sponsor? Why would you?" When you and I take up, we will face opposition and when you and I open our mouths and speak the gospel, we will face opposition. It is coming. But we can face it unalarmed. And by facing it unalarmed, it says this is a sign, the fact that you and I can face it unalarmed, the fact that you and I can make a choice to stand firm and not give back; this is a sign. It's a sign of the destruction of our, of the opponents of the gospel. It's a sign of our salvation and I wrestled hard with this phrase, even up until last night about 10 o'clock. And then finally it hit how I could

best explain this. There has never been a group of people in the history of the world with more consistently and persistently persecuted than Christians. There is no reason that the church should have survived the Roman Empire, yet look around you today. We're still here. The Roman Empire's not. Go back, it's small, churches aren't huge in Germany, but the Nazis aren't there. The church is. Go out to some of these nations where there are unbelievable persecution. Take maybe the worst, North Korea, the governments may be there, but they haven't been able to snuff out the church. You see, we survive, we persevere as the church. Though we may suffer, but we survive because our salvation is from God. So we cannot be intimidated. We can choose not to be intimidated. We can be sure because it is God who saves us. And not only this, but look lastly here, verse 29. Because we have a transformed understanding of suffering. For to you and I it has been granted. That word literally means to you and I it has been given as a gift of grace and divine favor to suffer for Christ's sake.

Let me pitch this in a different kind of question. How do you know if God has blessed you? How would you answer that question? If I asked you how do you know if God is blessing your life right now, how many of you would say, I know He's blessing my life because I am suffering for the cause of Christ? See, I'm afraid many of us, we would theologically reject the prosperity gospel of health, wealth, and prosperity. But I fear that for many of us in the way that we relate with God, when the hardship comes, when opposition rises up we say, "God, what's wrong?" Instead of saying, "Wow! God, You have favored me. I am suffering for Your sake. I have stood up for what is true. I have stood up for what is right. I have stood up and contended for the sake of the gospel. And now there is opposition and now there is opposition and this is a sign of Your favor." So when you face the loneliness for not going out, this is a sign of God's favor. When you face the people who think you're strange for valuing the values of Christ and not the values of the world and you deal with that animosity, this is a sign of divine favor. When you are assaulted verbally, or let's say one day physically, because you have opened your mouth to preach the gospel rightly. This is a sign of divine favor. It's not because suffering in and of itself is good. Suffering comes because we live in a sinful and broken and evil world. It's a sign of divine favor because our Savior is a man of sorrows and well acquainted with grief. Our Savior is a suffering Savior. It says that we are suffering on His behalf. We are suffering with Him. There is no more intimate aspect of walking with Christ this side of heaven than when we share in His sufferings. This text has used athletic imagery so let me just use this. If you're playing a sport, what players suffer the most in a game? Not the ones riding the bench. The players that suffer the most are the players who are favored. Why are they favored? Because they've been put on the field.

The question for you and I today is, what is our purpose? Are we as a church body unified in one soul contending side for side for the sake of the gospel here in the Brazos Valley? Or instead are we looking back and saying, "Man, we're so proud of all the Aggies that have come out and done great things. Oh, man, we're so excited at what a new pastor could bring. Or do we realize that today, this is God's call for us today?" The stakes are high. 10 out of every 11 people in our city do not know Jesus Christ. And how many of them have ever truly heard? The stakes are high. But our God is great and He has called us. So will we live out our citizenship well? Will we stand with one purpose knowing that that means we must contend for the sake of the gospel? Knowing that means we choose to not be intimidated by the opposition, but instead we can embrace when the suffering comes because we have been counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ. Where are we today?

Let's pray.

Father, the task is great. The call is clear. And Holy Spirit, for those of us in this room who are Yours, You enable us to go do it. So, Father, find our hearts responsive. God, where our purpose is not aligned with Your purpose, Holy Spirit, where we are not in submission to You, so Spirit that means if one of us is wrong, someone else in this room, You tell us clearly to get up and go take care of it. And at this time of invitation, if that's the case, may we do it. For those of us whom You've laid someone to encourage on our hearts, may we get up and go encourage. For those of us, God, maybe there's something internally where we are walking in submission with you, Father, may we deal with that with You so that we would be submitted, Holy Spirit, to You. That Your unity will pervade, that we would go out and contend. Father, open doors for us, open doors in the school, open doors in our jobs, open doors with our neighbors, open doors. God, make us bold. Help us see and do a work that only You can do in our city. Father, thank You for the call that You've given. It's in Your name that I pray, Lord.