

Ph. 1, 1:27-30

Signs of Joy

Theme: Citizens have responsibilities to their country, and citizens of heaven have responsibilities to their Savior.

I. The Sounds of Citizenship

What Paul expects to hear from Christians' battle are sounds of...

A. Standing Firm

1. Not Yielding to the Enemy (v. 27b)
2. Not Giving up the Gospel (v. 27c)

B. Striving Together (v. 28a)

1. Moving Forward
2. Moving Together

C. Stout (not shrinking in fear - vs. 28)

II. The Signs of Victory (28)

A. Opponents' Destruction (28b)

B. Believers' Salvation (28c)

III. Suffering → Rejoicing (v. 30)

A. The Gift of Suffering (7 gifts)

B. The Sound of Suffering (Joy)

Conclusion

“Have I been a good man? Tell me that I’ve lived a good life?” Questions asked by an old man through tears of doubt, as he falls on his knees in front of a Normandy cemetery headstone – the headstone of the man who saved him in a war almost a generation earlier. In that war, Private James Ryan was the fourth son of a woman who had lost three others. Military regulations say that she should not have to lose a fourth. So John Miller, played by Tom Hanks in Stephen Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* is dispatched with a squad of eight men to save the one remaining son. In the effort to save Private Ryan, all eight give their lives, including the squad leader, Miller, whose dying words to Private Ryan are, “Earn this.”

Then we flash forward sixty years to the octogenarian in the Normandy cemetery who is on his knees, still being crushed by the weight of being “worthy” enough to “earn” the sacrifice of the ones who saved him. Miller the squad leader, muses earlier in the movie what that would mean, “He better be worth it. He’d better go home and cure a disease, or invent a longer-lasting light bulb.” But what he has done to *earn* the sacrifice of others, we do not know. We see him surrounded by a wife and the children of a beautiful family, but he is still on his knees asking whoever will listen, “Have I been good enough to deserve this? Am I “worthy?”

You cannot read a portion of Scripture like this that tells us, “Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” without wondering if we are supposed to ask the same question: “Am I worthy of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who gave his life that I might live?” Have I lived well enough to “earn this?” Before we take one more step into the explanation of this passage, let us be clear about the answer to that question: Is your life “worthy” enough to “earn” the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in your behalf? The answer is, No, and the reason is that God never intended for you to have to “earn” the sacrifice because you could not. On the cross the debt for you sin and mine was paid in full. We are not made worthy of Christ’s sacrifice by our merits but by his mercy.

Christians too often hear echoing out of their conscience the dying words of Jesus to be “earn this.” But that is not what he said. His dying words were, “It is finished.” The debt is paid for those who could never be good enough for a holy God. We live in a manner that reflects love for him, that shows the worth of his gift. If we had to earn his sacrifice, it would crush us. But because it was the will of the Father to crush him in our behalf, we live to show the world his worth. That is actually what this passage says, if we will quiet the assaults of our consciences and listen to the assurance of the gospel – good news.

The words of the Apostle so beautifully exhort us to live out of joyful gratitude rather than crushing guilt if we will read carefully. “Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel” – I confess, on a first read that doesn’t help much. But the footnotes in many of your Bibles explain that “worthy” language is actually saying, “behave as citizens” of the gospel. This is a nifty play on words that the Apostle will drive home later (3:20) when he tells us that our citizenship is in heaven. Or, as he says in his letter to Ephesians, “You are already seated in heavenly places ... no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens.” Whatever we are called to do is on the basis of the citizenship we already have. We are not “earning” but “reflecting” the status that Christ has earned for us. We live in response to his grace not to earn it; we live in gratitude for his mercy, not to gain it. In the most basic sense, Paul calls us to *be what we are* – not to earn our citizenship but to act upon it. To claim the citizenship Christ has granted because we could never earn it.

Citizens have responsibilities to their country. And citizens of heaven have responsibilities to their Savior. No responsibility of citizens is more noble or important than the willingness to go to war (to give their lives in gratitude and loyalty for the nation they love), and strangely enough in this letter of joy, the responsibilities of those who rejoice in their heavenly citizenship is marked in terms of the sounds, signs and suffering of battle:

I. The Sounds of our Citizenship

Paul says that he want to hear that those in the battle are...

A. “Standing Firm” (v. 27c) which has a two-fold implication:

1. Not Yielding to the Enemy

Paul knows how hard it can be to live as a Christian in Philippi. He was beaten and imprisoned there. He knows the rage that comes when Greek gods are not honored. He knows that a Roman soldier who will give allegiance to Jesus will automatically be suspect for not giving loyalty to Caesar, especially with the growing Emperor Cult that will plague later generations of believers, when the Caesars begin to claim divinity.

Our citizenship requires that we stand firm, and that is not just the calling of the ancient church. I am increasingly reading the accounts of the Christian martyrs of our time – not to be morbid but because I believe that I am preparing myself and you for the challenges of be a citizen of heaven in this nation, increasingly hostile to the gospel (in business, schools, and government). That very hostility threatens the next aspect of “standing firm,” which is not simply about not yielding to the enemy but ...

2. Not Giving up the Gospel

Russel Moore of the ERLC writes of the responsibilities of heavenly citizens, saying that, if we allow the church to be held captive to political influence; if we allow its message to be narrowed to family values; or, if we sell its benefits on the altar of upward mobility, then we have eroded the very gospel ground on which we must stand. As much as we may desire blessing in each of these arena, when our message is not preeminently about Christ, it is not the gospel and we have given ground to the enemy within. – We lend voice to every just cause, fight every moral compromise, pray for every spiritual blessing, but we stand for *Jesus Christ and him crucified*. This ground we must not yield or compromise but stand firm. But standing ... is not the only responsibility of citizens of the Kingdom of Christ. Paul also want to hear that the church is ...

B. Striving Together (vs. 27d)

1. Moving Forward (not stopping)

Always the temptation is to retreat into ourselves. To settle for the Christian culture and comforts of those who are like us. But there is not only ground to hold, but ground to take. Paul will write that the ultimate purpose of the Kingdom is that “every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord” (2: 11?).

When Robert Morgan spoke to us last week from Exodus, he reminded us that the Lord’s instructions to the Israelites facing the onslaught of the Egyptians was first to stand firm, then to “go forward.”

We are in the early phases of a new comprehensive calling. As always the goal is not simply to satisfy ourselves but to say how do we reach family, community and world. Our resources are to be stewarded for the Lord, our eyes on the horizons of his purposes, the mission of the gospel, and for that reason we are not only to be moving forward, but

2. Moving Together (not alone)

Paul wants to hear that gospel progress is being made “side-by-side.” You see the image of the Roman legions advancing with shield locked to fellow soldiers shield, advancing against all resistance side by side. But the Roman military image does not exhaust the Apostle’s purpose. Who will be marching side by side in the church. Paul knows that he is a Jew writing to Gentiles, he is old with his message being taken by one younger – for the church to move forward side-by-side ethnicities and generations must unite to say that ordinary differences and antipathies have been

overcome by the gospel – and the world, even the demons (Eph. 3:10) must take notice.

Paul has actually made this point earlier when he said that he wanted to hear that the Philippians were standing firm “together” (v. 27), now he says it again and emphasizes it. Why? Because Paul knows that unity among diversity is a primary weapon for the Gospel. People expect us be divided into generation camps, generational churches, ethnic enclaves, ethnic churches, but if we can come together across the divides because God has made us one (all sinners, saved by the blood, and in Christ, brothers and sisters) this is a powerful statement that the Gospel is real and transformative.

The point that the Apostle makes over and over in his letters to the churches is that overcoming generational, demographic and ethnic divides is not just reflecting the sweetness of Christ, and it is not only something that we should think that it is nice that we embrace one another. Real gospel unity has not occurred until we realize that it is necessary that the divide be crossed for the sake of the witness of the gospel. There is something wrong when we break into churches or services of only one generation, there is something wrong when we only know how to minister to people who are culturally like us. We are not really moving forward until something in us says, “I need you to know the gospel and express it as fully as I should.”

Some years ago while ministering to pastors in Senegal, I was taking the message that I try to preach here: that Christ is making his grace known in all the Scriptures; that it is not enough to teach people to be good and to teach children to behave. The Gospel is not simply freedom from sin; it is the fuel of the Christian life. And, if that gospel is not the motivation and the enabling power of our goodness, then we are actually working against the gospel, however moral and good our teaching. Every other faith says the goal of religion is to teach people to be good enough for God; Christianity says that you cannot be good enough to be worthy of his grace, so God crossed the moral divide to rescue you by his mercy alone. Yet, as much as I tried to teach and say those things; it was a struggle. The culture was deeply legalistic, though naming the name of Jesus in the church was common, it was human obedience that really was people’s hope and the pastors’ refrain: “Be good enough for God.” Not only was that the context, but my translator was a Muslim who was really struggling with the concepts of grace. It was going badly. At the end of long morning of teaching, my hosts took me to lunch and then for some sightseeing. Late in the afternoon our car went back by the open air classroom where I

had been teaching. The pastors were still there. I asked, “Why?” Said my hosts, “It was hard for many to understand what you were saying today. So no one will leave until everyone understands.” They were teaching me to understand what it meant to “Strive side by side.” And when we work with Christians from different cultures and backgrounds and generations we will inevitably discover new dimensions of the gospel we need to “strive as one person, one church for the faith.” It will not be easy. If you really will serve side by side, you have to defer to one another, listen to one another, serve one another, allow others to lead and have say in where the church is going and what its priorities for the future will be. But such is the calling of citizens of heaven, who are about Christ’s cause more than their own comfort. And, if you are thinking to yourself right now, “Thank you pastor I have been waiting for others to listen to me, then perhaps you have not heard me, for fighting side by side is more about listening to others for the sake of the gospel. If we walk side by side has to listen and learn to walk in the stride of others.

But when we are really side by side, we not only will meet Paul’s desire to hear that we are standing and striving, but that we are also...

C. Stout (not shrinking in fear – vs. 28)

When we are standing firm together, when we are moving forward side by side, there is a result: fearlessness. This was the last of the instructions to the Israelites at the Red Sea: stand firm, move forward and do not fear.

These are not isolated commands but connected. When we stand firm together, move together side by side – our hearts are strengthened for the cause of Christ.

When young couples see marriages of 50 and 60 years in a culture of divorce, then they have less fear for their future.

When older generations, often were in church because everyone else was, see a young generation standing firm for Christ, when there is no cultural expectation, then the courage and dedication of the young is the example and encouragement to those older. [ERLC: Almost 4 in 10 young adults (ages 18-29 are religiously unaffiliated. That is three times the unaffiliated rate for Americans 65 and older, and four times the rate of young adults a generation ago (only 10 percent of young adults unaffiliated in 1980).]

By standing together, moving forward side by side, we instill mutual courage that has its own powerful effects for the gospel, providing not only the sounds of battle, but the signs of our Savior’s victory:

II. The Signs of Victory

When there is no fear in our eyes, what do the opponents of the Gospel see?

A. The Opponents' Destruction

When the town people finally rally together against the Western gunslinger, and there is no fear in their eyes, he knows it's time to get out of Dodge.

There is much that could incite fear in us: Civility seems to be collapsing, economic security is increasingly tentative, political prospects are more dismal than any adult can recall, incidents of racial and ethnic violence seem to be increasing, the differences among rich and poor are more polarizing, prevailing views of marriage, family, sex and gender are rapidly and dramatically shifting, and with all of these every indication that Christian influence and acceptance is diminishing rapidly. So we should run from our neighbors and hide our faith from our employers, don't risk, don't stand out, don't witness – is that our calling? No. If our response is fearful retreat, we have lost, but standing firm, moving forward and fearless is itself the mark of Christ's victory in soul for now and in society when his time is right.

Not only is believers' fearlessness a sign of our opponents destruction, it is also a sign of ...

B. The Believers' Salvation

It is important that we say our fearlessness is not the cause of our salvation (we do not earn our salvation), but it is a sign to opponents of our Salvation. To take a breath, square our shoulders and, with a heart of faith, stand for God's truth is to witness that our enemies are in more danger than we, and that we are confident of eternal security. Our confidence is our witness of our salvation – "and that from God" regardless of what happens on earth.

I have been reading the testimonies of Christian women in cities occupied by ISIS. The cruelties seeing spouses murdered, threats of being burned alive, threats of children being murdered if mothers do not convert or agree to marriages to ISIS warriors. A consistent theme with the accounts that make you want to rage and weep and flee all at the same time, is what happens when courage rises with danger.

The message to us is not that all threats will vanish – no, Jesus promised that those who would follow after him would be persecuted, as he was. But, if we stand firm, and in the timing of God move forward with fearlessness, then we mark the destruction of God's enemies and the certainty of our salvation.

When the battle sounds of our citizenship in the cause of Christ, that result in signs of our opponents' destruction and our salvation, culminate in

III. ~~The Privilege of Suffering (v. 29-30)~~

As The Gifts of Suffering (v. 29)

This is awkward language (i.e., that any of God's people would be *granted* suffering) and only makes sense in the most awful situation. I think of the young men and women, who in the face of our threat to our nation have considered it a privilege to offer their lives in military service. No one wants to suffer (that would be lunacy), but to return loyalty and service to the nation that nurtured us and our loved ones – in a way that goes deep into our hearts – is a privilege.

And to live and suffer for the cause of the Savior who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, took on the form of a servant, and became obedient to death, even death on a cross – to live for him, and, if needed, to suffer for his sake is a privilege granted to believers.

The Seven Gifts (v. 30)
Why? How is suffering in any way a gift "granted" to us?

- 1) Proves that we are on the Lord's side (if you never face a battle, never stand firm, never move forward for Christ against adversity – how could you know you are in his army?)

¹² 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you (Joh 15:20 ESV); All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, (2Ti 3:12 ESV)

- If no one is challenged by your witness; if your faith makes no waves and no noise, there is no evidence that you are following in the way of the Savior! To those who are perishing the message of the cross smells like death, and they are offended by it.

- 2) Displays our confidence in the eternal

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Mat 5:10-12 ESV)

- Those who are willing to forgo the pleasures and affirmations of this life for the rewards of heaven are affirming their confidence in heaven, and the conviction that our present afflictions are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

3) Testifies to the loyalty our Savior deserves

¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness....¹⁶ You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death.¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name's sake. (Luk 21:12-17 ESV)

- Suffering for him without yielding to evil testifies he is worthy of all we are and have!

4) Advances the cause of Christ

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,
²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, (Col 1:24-25 ESV)

- The church does not advance but by the prayers and tears of her people. If we are not willing to sacrifice, we have no part in his cause.

5) Gives Opportunity to Glorify God

¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. (1Pe 4:13-16 ESV)

¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. (Luk 21:12-13 ESV)

- Those who at this moment sing hymns to their captors bring more glory to God than the grandest choir anthem in the most comfortable of sanctuaries!"

6) Justifies the judgment of the wicked

⁶ God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you..., when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those ...on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, (2Th 1:4-9 ESV)

- We live in a moral universe and God will balance the scales with judgment upon those who have persecuted his people. This may mean nothing to you now, but knowing that God is just, righteousness will be vindicated and evil punished makes our suffering bearable!

7) Sanctifies Us

³We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,
⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,
⁵and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Rom 5:3-5 ESV)

- If you love him enough to suffer for him...
If you love his name enough to be persecuted for his name...
If you love his glory enough to live and die for it, then that changes you more and more into his likeness! Reflecting the death of Jesus, manifests the life of Jesus in us:

⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;
⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;
¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. (2Co 4:8-10 ESV)

All of which comes together to say that the mark of our citizenship (not what earns it, but what marks it) is: standing firm, moving together, suffering for him and -- because we have the eyes to see that it all advances his cause and glory in and through us -- rejoicing!

In every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, (Phi 1:18 ESV)

Br The Sound of Suffering (v.30) = Joy