Citizens of Another Country
Philippians 1:27-30

This is our third week in Philippians. Just to recap, it's about the middle of the first century, and Paul is most likely chained and under house arrest in Rome, awaiting trial as a Christian. And he doesn't know which way the verdict will go: will he live, or will he die? And in the midst of that uncertainty he takes the time to write this letter to the church at Philippi. Because they've heard that Paul's in trouble, and despite their own difficulties, they've sent Paul some money, to try and help provide for him in jail. But the guy who's brought that gift, a man called Epaphroditus, has also brought Paul news on how the church is doing in Philippi. And whilst things are ok, they also facing opposition and hostility themselves and, under that pressure, cracks are beginning to show in their unity, and some personal conflicts are beginning to break out.

And so in response to their gift, and their news, Paul writes this letter. And so far we've seen how by talking about his own experience in jail, Paul's helping them see life through the lens of the gospel: that even in adversity and suffering God is at work for our good and for Jesus' glory; and how knowing that enables us to face the circumstances and uncertainty of life with joy and certainty.

Well, Paul's talked about his situation there in Rome, but now he turns to theirs:

Philippians 1:27-30

I've got 4 simple points this morning: live worthy, stand firm, stand together and don't fear.

Live Worthy
Now, many of us who aren't Swiss live a slightly bizarre life here, don't we? We're here, and yet we're not really 'in,' it's as if we live on the edge of our communities. And you're faced with a choice: do you dive in and throw yourself into life here, and live like they live, and eat what they eat, which if you haven't guessed is basically melted cheese, and try and integrate and learn French, or do you live in an expat bubble, and try and preserve your way of life from back home until you return home. Or do you go half-way, a bit like our girls, in the local schools, think of here as home, but still swear that Cadbury's dairy milk beats Swiss chocolate any day, and that the only thing worth eating at breakfast is Marmite.

Now, of course, that dilemma has faced Christian missionaries for years. And up until about 150 years or so ago, you'd have these British missionaries going out to far flung places and they'd be trying to live and eat and dress like they were still in Victorian Britain. Until Hudson Taylor, in China, changed all that, and he lived and dressed like he was Chinese. In his lifestyle he became like the people he was trying to reach, whilst in his world view he was totally unlike them. He dressed like a Chinese, ate like a Chinese, lived like a Chinese, but saw the world like a Christian.

And whilst it may not seem it at first, it's exactly that tension, to be 'like' but 'unlike' those around you, to be one of them, but not one of them, that Paul is talking about here.

Look what he says in v27: 'Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.' And that phrase, 'manner of life', is interesting because it means 'to live like a citizen', to live in a way that's worthy of a citizen.

And the Philippians knew all about being citizens, because after a famous battle there the emperor had made a decree that all it's inhabitants, all it's citizens, were now Roman citizens, as if they lived in Rome itself. And the population of Philippi wore that badge with pride. And Philippi became this colony of Rome, a sort of Rome in miniature.

And yet Paul's not thinking of that city, or that citizenship. He's telling these Christians there in Philippi, and you and me, that now we have a kind of dual nationality. That they are citizens of another city. As he says later on in 3:20, 'our citizenship is in heaven.' That just as Philippi was a colony of Rome, so the church is a colony of heaven. That they have a higher allegiance, that now it's Christ who's Lord, not Caesar. And it's him they get their identity from.

And when Paul talks about this higher citizenship he has not got in mind some ethereal, floaty, harp-playing idea of heaven, it's about practical, 'how you live your life now' kind of living. Look at verse 27 again, '*Only* let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.' Only. Now, that's a strong word, isn't it? Only. This one thing. *The* stand out issue for you. In all the business and complexity, and perplexity of life, in all your trials and struggles and suffering, in all the joys and the heartaches of life… in all your living and doing, *this* is the one thing you *must* do: live worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Let your life be framed by a different story. Let your thinking be governed by another world-view. And let that be the gospel of Christ. Let the good news of all that God has done for you in Jesus transform the way you live, so that whilst you are like those around you, you're also unlike them. Let the way God has treated you in Christ profoundly influence the way you treat others. Let the way God sees you because of Jesus deeply affect the way you see life, and yourself and others. Let the way Jesus has paid the price for your sin steel you against temptation to sin. Yes, defend the gospel, yes proclaim the gospel, but first of all live the gospel. Let all that God has done for you in Jesus permeate all of life. Let it soak into your being, and then live as a citizen of heaven whilst living as a citizen of this world.

And Paul says that this living worthy of the gospel is going to be marked by 3 things: standing firm, standing together, and not being afraid.

Stand Firm

Verse 27 again, 'Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit.'

Now why does Paul need to encourage these Philippians to stand firm? Well, it's pretty obvious isn't it… almost certainly because they are wobbling. They're not in full-blown retreat. They're not abandoning their faith. They're not falling

away. But life is not one big spiritual knees-up for them, they're facing opposition for their faith, and maybe they're just beginning to wobble.

And just think how something similar might happen today: let's say you face low grade mockery for your faith at school, or imagine promotion at work (or frankly even just *keeping* your job) requires you to work in ways that are contrary to the gospel, or let's say you face criticism or hostility because you refuse to bow down to the gods of this age like sex or money or individualism or moral relativity, then you're going to face this temptation aren't you? Do I keep my head down, do I stay silent, do I withdraw into the Christian ghetto, or if not that do I weaken and water it all down, to try and take the heat off a bit, to try and fit in more, to look more like a citizen of Rome, than a citizen of heaven?

And Paul's saying, look, when you live worthy of the gospel, when you know the price that Jesus has paid for you because he loves you, when you know that God has raised him from the dead and that he's Lord, not whichever political figure is currently calling the shots and bending with the wind, when you know that it's ultimately his word that matters, then you'll stand fast. You won't wobble, whatever anyone else says.

But that's not because you have a backbone of steel and a British stiff-upper lip. Look what Paul says, it's 'standing firm *in one spirit*.' Now, if you read the commentators on this passage they'll argue back and forth as to whether Paul means something like, 'stand firm in one united spirit, in one common purpose,' or does he mean 'stand firm in the one Holy Spirit.' And which one is it? Well, just think about it. And think about the people Paul's writing to, people who were as socially diverse: well-to-do merchant traders, prison guards, slave girls, who are under increasing pressure from outside, and amongst whom cracks are begging to show. And they cannot hope to stand firm by depending on some kind of manufactured sense of togetherness. The Philippians and you and I can only stand firm in one common purpose, in one spirit, through the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit is the bond that glues us and them together. And it is only by standing firm in Him, depending on him, rooting ourselves in Him, that we can hope to stand firm at all: Looking to the Spirit for the strength and courage and wisdom we need to swim against the tide, to know when to speak and when to stay quiet, how to differ without being obnoxious, how to take the hits without losing heart, in short how to live as a citizen of heaven, being a representative for Christ, whilst living as a citizen of the world.

But if standing firm in the Spirit is the first mark of living worthy of the gospel, doing that together is the second.

Stand Together

Verse 27 again, 'Standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.'

Now, if the historians are right, the majority of the population at Philippi by this time was descended from Roman soldiers. So these guys Paul is writing to would know that whilst a soldier standing isolated on the field of battle could easily be picked off, when those same soldiers linked shields and stood shoulder to

shoulder they were a match for anyone. And Paul says that's how we're to stand firm in one Spirit, by striving side by side.

You see there are two dangers when you're under pressure, and feeling the heat. The first is that you withdraw into yourself, and you shut down on others, you go into survival mode and you try and face what you're facing alone. And the second is that, under pressure, you turn on your friends. That in your stress, you mistake your friend for an enemy and start shooting at him or her.

But Paul says we are to stand firm and stand together. And these guys at Philippi needed to hear that, because as pressure from the outside was mounting, cracks were beginning to show on the inside in their relationships. But instead of fighting against one another, they needed to fight alongside one another. You see, having adversaries, having those who oppose you is a given in the Christian life. We just have to accept that not everyone is going to like us, because not everyone is going to like the gospel. In fact Jesus said 'Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.' (Luke 6:26). So if everyone thinks we're great, strangely enough God doesn't. But whilst you will have adversaries, your brother is your brother, he's never your enemy. In fact, this Christian brother or sister who you are tempted to fall out with and speak ill of is someone for whom Christ died. So rather than fight and strive against one another we are to strive side by side.

But interestingly, Paul doesn't even say we are to strive side by side and *against* our opponents, does he? He says v27, 'striving side by side *for* the faith of the gospel.' And Jesus immediately follows up 'woe to you when all people speak well of you' – in other words, you are going to have enemies with 'love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.' (Luke 6:27-28). Yes you are going to have enemies, and woe to you if you don't, but you are to love them. So it is not that we are to be known for fighting *against* this or that issue or individual or group, but fighting *for*, striving, giving all our energies, together, for the faith of the gospel, for the faith of the good news that God loves you and Jesus died for you, that he rose again and has broken the strangle hold of sin and death over you, that the true king of heaven and earth offers an amnesty to all rebels and calls on them to lay down their arms and come and enjoy the feast in his kingdom.

But Paul clarifies this standing together for the gospel in one further way: v27, '*with one mind* striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.' Now, you've heard that expression, 'when everyone is thinking the same, no-one is thinking.' And there's truth in that. And often it's out of the crucible of argument and disagreement and debate that clarity and truth comes. And there are going to be things that we disagree on and argue over. But on this gospel, on what God has done and is doing in Jesus we cannot afford to disagree. In fact, it's what defines us as citizens. It's the charter of the land. It is *the* defining issue.

And so Paul says, when it comes to the faith of the gospel, these Philippians, and you and me, are to be of one mind, literally, of one *psyche*. Living worthy of the gospel means having the gospel unite us in our focus, our vision, our ambitions, that what frames our inner lives, what energizes us, would all be flowing out of

what Jesus has done for us. That whilst we can legitimately think differently on lots of things, when it comes to the gospel, we're all thinking and feeling the same, that it's this that's shaping and molding and transforming us. That it's this that's defining our lives together.

And Paul saying that is all the more poignant because, if you remember from last week, he's got these guys in Rome, fellow Christians, who are making life hard for him. And he sees these divisions just beginning to appear in Philippi, and he says, look, when we understand what Jesus has done for us, and live out of the good of that, when we live worthy of the gospel, there is going to be this deep unity, this coming together and standing together, and striving together, for the gospel, and not against one another.

But there's one last way this living worthy of the gospel is going to show itself:

Don't Fear
V28: let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, '… and not frightened in anything by your opponents.'

Now, I don't know if you know the animated film Chicken Run, but it's about a bunch of chickens trying to escape their chicken farm, which is like a second world war prisoner of war camp. And there's this wonderful moment when the leader of the chickens sticks a poster on the wall of the hut where all the chickens are meeting, and this poster is about their farm and the chicken pies that are going to be coming from it. And it dawns on the chickens that they're going to be made into pies, and they all start sqwarking in panic. And one of them says, 'but I don't want to be a pie… I don't like gravy.' At which the leader says, 'now ladies please, let's not lose our heads.' At which the chickens reply, 'lose our heads, arrgh!" and they all start panicking again.

Well, when Paul uses that word 'frightened' it's a word that could be used for a stampede of startled horses. It's got that sense of scattering in fear, of that feeling of rising fear bordering on panic, of losing our heads. Of feeling intimidated, and out of control. And Paul says, 'when you're facing what you're facing, don't respond like that.'

But just think about what these Philippians do face for the sake of Christ. Their environment is increasingly hostile. They almost certainly face loss of jobs, and loss of social standing, because they're refusing to bow the knee to the emperor. As a result they are suffering serious financial hardship and loss of liberty and life are a growing possibility and within a few years will become a harsh reality for Christians across the empire. And Paul says, 'I know you face all that, but don't be frightened.' But how can you not fear that? How can you not look at that kind of present trial, with no prospect of it getting better and not be afraid? And Paul's answer is, you can do it if the gospel is the lens through which you see all of life, *and* if you've got a church standing with you.

You see if you know that God loves you, that He is for you, that He works everything for your good, even what others mean for your harm, that whatever happens, live or die, you win, that Christ is life and death is gain, then you can

face what you face now with out fear. If you know that your heavenly father approves of you, and accepts you and welcomes you because of Jesus, then if you face rejection and hostility and mockery because of Jesus, you can face it without fear, because it doesn't matter what they think. If you know that He holds your life in His hands and He will allow nothing to happen to you without a loving fatherly purpose, if you know that whilst there is zero promise of ease and comfort and prosperity in this life there are incredible promises of grace and joy and reward in this life and in eternity, then you can face a future that might make you tremble, and face it without fear.

And when you understand the good news of Jesus like that and as a result you respond fearlessly like that to opposition, it's going to have two effects, Paul says, it's going to be like a two way sign. It's a sign to those who oppose the gospel, v28: 'this is a clear sign to them of their destruction', whether they read that sign or not, and you know from your own driving that whilst there are plenty of signs it doesn't mean you read and obey them, like speed limits! When Christians grasp the gospel and it starts influencing how they live, how they do business, how they handle money, how they treat the poor, how they respond to opposition and hostility, and they do that united and together whilst at the same time loving their enemies, and striving for the good news, not against each other, it's going to be sign, a warning, that there *are* two camps, and one's the King's and the other isn't, and you've got to decide which side you're on or face certain defeat and eternal ruin.

But this way of responding to opposition and suffering is also a sign to us: v28, 'this is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.' Now you might think, hang on a second, how does my suffering and facing opposition for my Christian faith and me facing that without fear, how does that tell me I'm saved. Well, firstly, because you know you couldn't do that on your own, you know you can only respond like that because you are standing firm in the One Holy Spirit, it's his doing. But secondly Paul tells us why in v29: 'For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.'

Now just let that sink in. Paul's saying that not only is your faith, your believing in Jesus God's gracious gift to you, so is suffering for him. In just the same way you suffering for your faith, you paying the price for Christ, you taking the flack when you stick your head above the parapet as a Christian at school or at work, that opposition you get, those in coming missiles, are just as much God's gift to you, when it's for Jesus, as your salvation is. Because it tells you that when that's happening, it's not because God has abandoned you, or turned His back on you, and left you to fight this alone, you're facing this because you're His.

And you can face opposition and suffering for Christ without fear, when you know it's a sign of His grace to you, that it's a mark of whose side you're on, that you're His, that you belong to Him and not to the world. That you're a citizen of another country.

So, live worthy of the gospel. Stand firm. Stand and strive together. And don't fear.