

Joining Jesus' Story
Week 4: From outside and inside

We are early on in a teaching series called **Joining Jesus' Story**. This series will take us through the book of Philippians. We call it a book in the Bible, but really it is a **letter**. The **Apostle Paul**, who was a big part of the Jesus movement spreading across the world, wrote it to a church that he helped start in a town called Philippi. Hence, the name Philippians. **Paul is writing this letter in prison** because of his preaching about Jesus.

This week, we pick up at 1:27 where **Paul turns a corner**. He has talked about his situation, but now he focuses on **the situation that the readers find themselves**. His readers aren't in prison, but they **do face some resistance** and some of that could knock them off track if they don't have the right attitude like Jesus. **Some of this is coming from outside**, from the very Roman culture in Philippi. But there are **issues from within their church** that could also derail what God wants to do.

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, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ 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, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 1:27-2:4

Paul, **at the very start**, tells you what this section is about and, therefore, what we are going to focus upon this morning. **Live your life in a way that fits into Jesus' story.**

Not living in a way that is at odds with Jesus' story. That's what it means to join Jesus' story. **Have the same attitude as Jesus** and then you will act more like Jesus would if he were in your shoes.

If Jesus' story **were a movie**, you could easily be plugged in as a character in this story and it would fit, it would make sense.

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ...Remember, now **he is talking more about their situation** than his own. This is given in the form of a command, or challenge.

In these verses, he is going to talk about **forces from outside** in the form of persecution and **forces on the inside** in the form of disunity. **In both cases, they are to live lives worthy of the gospel.**

Paul uses a phrase translated **manner of life (ESV)**, conduct yourself (NIV), live as **citizens of heaven (NLT)**.

This has political overtones. Don't conduct yourself with outsiders, who persecute you in a way that you put citizenship in Philippi as your priority. **Act like you are citizens of the Kingdom of God.** Don't get squeezed into their mold. **Many around them believed that you couldn't be a good citizen of Philippi and be a part of this Jesus movement.** Others believe that it was pressure to **worship the emperor.** This particularly because there were a lot of **retired Roman soldiers** in Philippi who made this a very patriotic city toward Rome. 92

Behave in a way that puts your citizenship in the Kingdom of God now, and in the future in heaven above, fitting in well in Roman Philippi.

Paul knows that because of where they are in Philippi, **they will receive pressure** from outside to **not remain faithful** to Jesus and his gospel. Then he says...**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,³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.**

What does he mean by the same conflict as he did? Here's what Paul experienced when he was in Philippi earlier. He healed a young slave girl who

was possessed and could tell people's fortunes. Her owner made money off of having her as some sort of a sideshow act. When Paul and Silas healed her, that was over and the master was mad.

Her masters' hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. ²⁰ "The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!" they shouted to the city officials. ²¹ "They are **teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice.**" ²² A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. ²³ They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. ²⁴ So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks. Acts 16:19-24

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the **gospel of Christ**, so that whether I come and see you or am absent. **Here's what he wants for them.** I may hear of you that you are **standing firm** in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side **for the faith of the gospel**, V.

If we are to live our lives in a way that fits into Jesus' story, then we had better...1. First, understand what "the gospel of Christ" is.

The **gospel (proclamation of good news)** is not only the story we hear in **chapter 2:6-11** but also it is what scripture says **our response should be** to this story of Jesus. We call this the **declarative statements** about Jesus and the **imperative statements**, or commands, to respond to who Jesus is.

Gospel Definition slide. If you weren't around when we did our series called **The Discipleship Gospel**, I suggest you listen to it. Also read the Discipleship Gospel...

So if (really means "since") there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Since you have been given all of this, all of these blessings and resources and comforts...

- **Encouragement in Christ.**

- **Comfort from Paul's love** for them.
- **Participating (Fellowship)** in what the spirit is doing in their lives with Paul.
- **Affection and sympathy.**

Since you have participated in all of this, Paul wants you to make him as joyful as he could possibly be by pursuing unity in all ways with one another. Be one, not divided.

That brings us to the second way we are to Live our lives in a way that fits into Jesus' story...**2. Maintain the unity Jesus brings.**

Later on in the letter, we are going to hear about a conflict between two people in the church. The lack of unity within could also cause them to not live their lives in a way that fits into Jesus' story.

Notice that I said, "maintain the unity Jesus brings." That is because **when we are born again**, stepped over the line of faith, and are adopted into his family, we **automatically have a familial connection** with others who have been saved. They are a part of God's family or his body. Jesus has united us as one with them; we just need to maintain it.

At Hillside Ave Church of God in Springfield, Ohio, where I grew up, this was **practiced in a very practical way**. You called people brother or sister and then usually their last name. Even the pastor. My pastors were never called Reverend or Pastor, it was always Brother Johnson and Brother Reed.

What is our example of unity? Simple, it's God. God is three, but yet is one. He is God the father, God the son Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit. **Three, but yet in complete oneness of purpose.** As father, God is holy righteous creator and judge. **As Son**, he is the one who came to us in order to save us and teach us how to live. And **Spirit** is the one who stays with us, in us, and enables us to live and love others like Jesus did.

They have different roles, but all pulling in the same direction for the same purposes. There was not inner jealousy. That's how we are supposed to operate as a church as his disciples in this world. **We are designed differently** and have **different life experiences**, but we had better not be

doing anything that gets in the way of God's purposes in this world. The life of Jesus, the story of Jesus, is supposed to be lived through us.

Unity is not meaning agree about everything, thinking the same, voting the same, and acting the same. It's about agreeing upon the main things and not allowing our difference to become so important that what we have in common, the gospel, is lost.

This next scripture is **Jesus praying** to His Heavenly Father for the people who were and will be following him. **What do you think was so important that Jesus prayed to his heavenly father on behalf of his followers?**

¹¹ Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are...²⁰ "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. ²² "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. ²³ I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. John 17:11 & 20-23

Do you see what Jesus did? He asked that they might be one, as he and the father are one. He is the example for unity. Now I know that this is a hard concept in an overly individualistic society, where it is assumed that what is right is what is best for me. We don't think collectively very well.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. It is through participating in the spirit. It is the spirit that binds us together. The spirit creates unity, but we have to participate in what the spirit is creating. That is why Paul is giving this call to unity as a command.

If we don't create it, then we must maintain it. **Maintaining Unity demands promoting the interests of others not my own.**

This is where Jesus' attitude comes into the picture.

This idea of unity in the body of Christ is **all of the scripture and greatly under-preached**. It is our heritage in the Church of God. **It was distinctive**. But it gets harder and harder in an individualistic society.

Unity is preached in a meeting in the deep south...

"Selfish ambition." Aristotle used these words in his discussion of the various reasons for political revolutions. He uses it to describe **"the greedy grasp for public office through unjust means."** In other words, don't treat others within the body of Christ like you are power hungry and **willing to allow the ends, you getting your way, to justify the means**.

If we are looking to get our needs met, we will never be satisfied. Why? Because **we were created** and then placed in the body of Christ to serve and love like Jesus. That means we get ours when we look to the interests of others first. **It seems backwards, but I get satisfaction and a full life, not by trying to get what I think will bring it.**

You see the enemy within can be more powerful than the enemy outside. We like to talk about how bad the culture is and how it's hurting our kids and then we go home and **criticize the church and it's leaders over Sunday dinner**. Or we simply separate ourselves from the body of Christ.

My dad...My dad knew that what was going on in that meeting was as dangerous as the enemy outside the door.

That's about possible problems from within; let's go back to the pressure that comes from outside. That brings us to the **third way we are to Live our lives in a way that fits into Jesus' story**. Paul calls us to...**3. Respond to our adversaries like Jesus did his.**

It's hard for us to relate to the persecution that they had, but then can join others who are being persecuted. Don't even try to compare it to

yourself, you will look foolish. Look at what happened to Paul. That is definitely a possible outcome for the people reading this letter.

I've heard people comparing that being told to wear a mask with persecution. We need to be careful about this.

[Open Doors USA website.](#)

What kind of opposition do we have? We are seen as backward and unprogressive. "The intense materialism of modern culture, moreover, trivializes the spiritual realm and puts subtle pressure on believers to view their answers to life's profound questions as unimportant and slightly backward. This could lead believers, even in places where religious freedom is respected, to feelings of isolation and depression. When this happens, it is no less important for them to heed Paul's advice not to be frightened by the forces raged against them." 98-99

Paul is trying to do for the Philippians what the Holy Spirit had done for Paul when he was in the midst of persecution. Listen to this. ⁹ **One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, "Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't be silent!"** ¹⁰ **For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me."** Acts 18:9-10 Obviously Paul was, at other times, attacked and harmed. **But this message gave him confidence.** He didn't then, when he did get beaten, arrested, shipwrecked, thrown in prison, curse God for not keeping his word. **No, he called it an honor to suffer with Christ.**

That brings us to what Paul said to the Corinthian Church. ⁴ **He comforts us in all our troubles** (So that we can feel awesome about ourselves and have a fulfilling life...no) **so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.** 2 cor. 1:4

Like the rest of the NT Paul **"does not suggest that the Philippians engage in an aggressive offensive against their persecutors.** Paul suggests instead that they maintain their composure and await the day when God will destroy those who oppose the gospel.

²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD. **Romans 12:19 That sin against you or me is more offensive and hurtful toward God then it is for us.** Let him take care of it. **He's the only one who, because of his perfection, has the right to pass judgment.**

Let me warn you that if the previous scripture wasn't disturbing enough, then this one might just put us over the top. You may want to avert your eyes from this one. It's probably the most upsetting and controversial part in scripture and, therefore, the least practiced by Christians.

⁴³ "You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. **Matthew 5:43-45**

So let me get this straight, I'm supposed to love and pray for them. "OK I can do that. I will love the sinner not the sin, and I will pray that God will change them so they don't persecute me anymore. There, I can say I love them and I have prayed for them. Finished. Now that doesn't seem so bad, does it?

Oh, what's this I read a little further in that don't seek revenge scripture from Romans, and there's this. I'm sorry. Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads." ²¹ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good. Romans 12:20-21

I am literally being told to not only forgo the satisfaction of seeing those who pick on me "get theirs". And not only am I supposed to love and pray for them, but I'm told to meet their needs by serving them. I'm supposed to demonstrate Jesus' style love toward them.

CSM serving at Project Angel Food.

Here's a little of our heritage as Christ followers. Christian philosopher, **Athenagoras**, pleaded with emperors, **Marcus Aurelius** and **Lucius Aurelius Commodus**, to stop their policy of persecuting Christians. "At one point he asked the emperors to consider whether any philosophers of their acquaintance, despite their good educations and quick minds, 'have so purified their own hearts as to love their enemies instead of hating them; instead of upbraiding those who first insult them (which is certainly more usual), to bless them; and to pray for those who plot against them.'" "With us, on the contrary, you will find unlettered people, tradesmen, and old women, who, though unable to express in words the advantages of our teaching, demonstrate by acts the value of their principles. For they do not rehearse speeches, but evidence good deeds. When struck, they do not strike back; when robbed, they do not sue; to those who ask, they give and they love their neighbors as themselves." 100

If we are to live a life that fits into the story of Jesus, then we will experience trouble from outside and from inside, but the story of Jesus also gives us ways to remain faithful and demonstrate Jesus' love and, therefore, God's power. **We aren't just told, sit there and take it, from our culture.** We are told to pray, love and serve. **We aren't just told to let disunity fester in our midst, we are told to maintain the unity that will be a witness to this world by not looking to my interests first, but rather other's interests.**

Steps to Joining Jesus Story

1. **Join Jesus' story by learning his Gospel.**

We have copies of our gospel definition. There is power in having clarity about what Jesus' gospel, his proclamation of good news really is.

I'm encouraging you to take this home and put it somewhere visible. I'm going to encourage you to take those main words, **4 are declarative statements** that tell Jesus' story. **The other 3 are imperatives**, or ways we must respond to this story of Jesus. There are seven. Read and feed on one per day.

Maybe in that process, or even right now, you are aware that you have never responded to the fact that Jesus is a king, teaching about his kingdom who suffered and died on a cross and was resurrected all for my good.

Maybe this is your time.

2. Pray John 17:11 & 20-23

Maybe you've never prayed scripture before but here's one that you can pray that is what Jesus prayed for you and me.

Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now **protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are...**²⁰ "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. ²² "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. ²³ I am in them and you are in me. **May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.** John 17:11 & 20-23

Live your life in a way that fits into Jesus' story by knowing what his gospel is, maintain the unity he has provided, and responding to our adversaries like he did his.