

March 16, 2025 - Lent 2 Pastor Ventura
Stand Firm in the Faith Philippians 3:17–4:1

In the name of Christ, amen!

This is the second week in our Lenten journey. In Lent we take the time to walk with Jesus to the cross, and as we walk, we must contemplate the great tribulations he faced, and how he stood firm in what he came to accomplish. His example and his victory will help us in our own tribulations too. For as certain as he was scorned and hated for his grace and mercy, so also those who follow in his footsteps.

One of the first to suffer was the apostle Paul. He did face many obstacles indeed and much opposition to the Gospel of Jesus he was preaching. But what caused him grief and pain, was that many of those who at first received the message of the Gospel walked away from its truth. Even becoming enemies of the cross, as he says in the epistle reading for this morning. Yet his faith and his mission didn't falter. So this morning we hear him begging the congregation at Phillipi not to give up either, instead to "stand firm ... in the Lord," knowing that their "citizenship is in heaven."

Paul knew the Philippians were being seduced by false teachers to abandon the righteousness of faith in favor of either a legalistic works-righteousness or the worldly sensual pleasures of his time. The struggles they faced as a congregation no doubt made it seem as if capitulation or compromise was better than remaining steadfast in the faith—faith in the Gospel that the apostle had delivered to them.

Now as we look back to the Philippians we can't but ask ourselves. What about us here today. Is there anything that is shaking your faith right now?

Something that is coming between you and God, something that is preventing from staying the course of your faith?

Maybe it is the amount of teachings and preaching, and so called prophecies that abound all around, on the radio, tv, or the internet, that are confusing you, and you have been wondering who really is preaching the truth? Maybe and perhaps the best way is just to stop going to church altogether, that way you don't have to wrack your brain trying to decide what is the truth. Others have been deceived with watered down gospel, that it has lost the heart of it.

Maybe it is the message of law and gospel. We are looking for the Gospel, words of consolation, but somehow what sticks more is the condemnation of the law. Back in Vancouver, in our Hispanic congregation, a girl said, I'm not coming to Church anymore, because every time I come I feel bad after the service, I'm not uplifted. Instead of being encouraged I feel terrible. As you see she got stuck in the condemnation of the Law, she lost focus of what Jesus does in the forgiveness of her sins.

Is there anything shaking your faith at this time? Maybe it is all what is going in the world today, the action of politicians, leaders and followers, that call themselves Christians, yet their actions are contrary to what Jesus has taught us. How is that possible? And why would God allow such a thing? Maybe there is no God? Right?

Maybe is your family, going through family issues, husband against wife, or vice versa, parents against children, children against their parents. Enough to shake our faith.

Or maybe your own physical or personal circumstances, caused by you or caused by others, that you begin to wander, what is God, who is all loving is allowing for these things to happen to me, or to us.

Any of those reasons can come between God and us, can indeed affect our faith. Maybe what the world offers is perhaps the best way to go. We live in a world where the pursuit of pleasure is seen as a human right and where instant gratification is regarded as a necessity. Maybe it is best that way. Some of the members at Philippi thought so, and they become even enemies of the cross. Although some probably had thought that they were still Christians, still believed in God, but Paul says, not really. There is more to thank just say I'm Christian and I believe in God, therefore I deserve salvation. We need the cross of Christ. And we need to stand firm.

That's what Jesus says, "But the one who endures to the end will be saved." (Matthew 24:13).

Paul's call is for us to remain firm in the Lord, and even suffer. But it is hard to imagine that suffering for the sake of the Gospel would be seen as a positive thing. A soldier who suffers for his country is only a hero if people love their country and understand the grave dangers of losing the war. A suffering Christian is only a hero if Christians love their heavenly country and understand the dangers of losing the Gospel.

The Gospel that provides as an unmerited grace, which Paul is calling to love it. It is the free and unmerited grace of God—the gift of Christ's righteousness providing us salvation and a heavenly home. It is so much grace that helps us to remain discerning and steadfast in the faith in those time when are faced with false teachers and false gospels who present, and those pose before us real dangers to our faith. Will help us to remain strong facing those things that threaten to come between us and God, between God and our faith—even if it means suffering or forfeiting certain worldly pleasures. And so we can stand firm he calls encourages us to model our lives after true servants of the Gospel who have remained steadfast and unmoved in their faith.

It is critical that Christians stand firm, steadfast, in their devotion to the Gospel of Jesus and his grace. But standing firm, or not, depends on your faith. The reason that we allow for whatever to come between God and us, between God, is our weak faith, that is we allow that gift of faith to weaken and dissipate, we don't nourish it, we starve it to death.

Weak faith weakens our standing firm, steadfast, especially when we are faced with tribulations on account of God's Word and with life's worries and wealth.

Sure, we rejoice when we hear God's Word, for it assures us that Jesus has earned heaven for us by his death and resurrection. But then as soon as we let Jesus out of our focus faith begins to shake.

We let Jesus out of focus when we begin to hear, dangerous ideas that false teachers proclaim, or when allow our own reasoning to lead us, or when we allow the

actions of others get into our heads, and when we do that our standing firm and steadfast, is endangered.

Paul says watch out therefore, because look to what happens to those who gave up on their faith: “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. (v. 19)

Those are the dogs and evil doers that you need to watch out for. Previously in verse 2 and 3, he writes: “Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—”

“Look out for the dogs.” Wow, this a bit of harsh description, isn’t it? Yet that’s how he compares those who are outside of the true faith, those who emphasise self righteousness and or water down the Gospel, those false teachers who actively spread their misleading doctrines.

Those, the book Revelations says: “Outside” out side of heaven” are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practises falsehood.” (Revelation 22:15) but in heaven are the ones who are blessed “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.” (Revelation 22:14)

Friends time hasn’t changed that much from Paul’s time. Today we see many denominations claiming to be Christian literally advocating deviant sexuality, as they are indifferent to all other violations of the commandments of God. And then there is those who in the name of conservative religiosity who use the name of Christ for personal name, greed and fame.

Therefore, Paul’s warning stands, don’t loose focus of Christ the Saviour. Stand firm and be strengthened by the promise of Heaven our home. And as you walk the way of the cross, imitate those along the same path. Walk away from those who boast in their own works and deeds and spiritual accomplishments. There is a pretense of holiness that is not acceptable to God.

Instead immigrate those who have “washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb” that is those who recognize their sins and have gone to the cross for forgiveness. Reject those who say they don’t have anything to ask for forgiveness for.

Why not, then, model our lives after our Lord Jesus who left the joy of heaven and endured the cross with all its shame. But then he was seated at the right hand of the throne of God. He is our greatest encouragement not to grow weary and lose heart.

All we can count on is won by Jesus, that Jesus’ cross has made us God’s children again—with all the promises that come from being his. He alone accomplished our salvation. To keep focusing on Jesus, mans to cling on to Jesus’ perfect life and sinless death, his, righteousness, a righteousness that is not our own but a gift given to us, is the only truth by which we can be saved. And confidence in this righteousness of Christ saves us from sin and death. So why not model after the

steadfastness of Jesus, and also on those who stood firm, steadfast, on behalf of the Gos-pel.

We through baptism, have been made citizens of an eternal city and kingdom, far greater than anything this world has to offer. Knowing this helps us to reject life's materialistic and sensual temptations. So then, when our faith in Christ stands firm, God is leading us to grasp and appreciate how much more wonderful is living as citizens of the kingdom of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, than wallowing in the appetites and immoralities of this world (3:20–21).

You are not alone in you walk, there are others who you can model after too, Paul says. His courage and perseverance for example, and of his fellow missionaries as they sacrificed everything for the sake of the pure Gospel (2 Tim 4:2–8) Paul preached the Word, pure doctrine, in and out of season, with great patience, even to those whose itching ears wanted something entirely different. He endured hardship and eventually was poured out like a drink offering, killed. Yet he fought the good fight, finished the race, kept the faith, and finally received the crown of righteousness. And that crown is for us too—for all who love the Lord's appearing.

We can model our life after those in our own history too, and in our present world who have remained steadfast in the Christian faith. We may not think that what we do matters, but when we are steadfast in the face of suffering or persecution, even in the smallest of ways, we will be models for those who are around us and those who will come after us. Therefore, model your life, hear only those who truly have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. But run away from the one who says "I don't need to repent" because surely, that person doesn't know Jesus and what he does.

So, is there anything that is coming between God and you, leave to God, talk to God about that, and yes, he will deal with that, yes he will encourage you, yes he will walk with you even as he is carrying his cross during this season of lent, and always.

In his name, amen.