

Sermon on **Philippians 3:17-21** for 20th Sunday after Pentecost – 10.18.20
St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

Are these difficult political times - the polarization of sides, flinging mud back and forth? Are these difficult religious times - churches leaving behind God's Word in an attempt to stay relevant, or delving headlong into the political arena to try to make God's kingdom come by their politics? Do Christians add rules and regulations to God's Word as though serious Christians act only their way? Do some just want the title "Christian" and live directed by the world's wisdom as though God's commands don't apply to their lives? Are these difficult personal times – the love of many growing cold, as isolation does strange things to us? Yes.

Same was true for Paul. Roman emperors with their growing corruption ruled over them. Jews rejected Christ and falsely accused Paul. He had been imprisoned awaiting trial for more than three years. Paul had been beaten severely in the city of Philippi, where the Christians lived to whom he writes. Paul contended constantly with Judaizers in his congregations – people who called themselves Christians, but said you had to live like Jews to be saved. "Get circumcised. Don't eat this. Stay away from that." Christ's cross was unnecessary to them. There were some who liked the name "Christian" but jumped back into pagan ways with no regard for God's Word or will in their lives, and led others to sin too. It's as though they never heard the words of Jesus, "deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me." Paul speaks the truth into the mess of his time and ours,

Live as Citizens of God's Kingdom!

- 1) Imitate the godly together.**
- 2) Don't be an enemy of the cross of Christ.**
- 3) You are heaven's citizen waiting for your Savior.**

"Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (Philippians 3:17-21 – NIV 2011).

I. Imitate the godly together. *"Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do."* Who are your Christian role models? What stands out about them? The joy they have, their trust in God, their love for God's Word and his ways and his people. They bear up under suffering, trusting God's wisdom. They know their humanity, their sinfulness, and their failures. They also know their Savior, the forgiveness he brings, and the endurance he gives us to live. They are not afraid and humble enough to align their lives to God's will and commands. Their faith in Christ is sincere. Imitate them.

Do not dilly dally any longer. Don't put it off till next year, till things slow down, till the kids are older or out of the house, till I'm retired, till I feel the need. Someone in a Bible Information Class said wisely, "I want to be around good influences." They knew there were many who were bad influences for their faith and their lives. Paul did too.

II. Don't be an enemy of the cross of Christ. *"For, as I often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ."* Paul knew what it was to live in the darkness of unbelief and yet think he was the example of following God. He persecuted Christians and thought he was serving God. He was confident his life was good enough for God, that his lineage and works were enough to stand in the presence of the Almighty. Jesus showed him how wrong he was, and how much God must love him to forgive him and bring him into his service and give him a full life here and now and an eternity in heaven.

Paul knew there were many like him who still held onto their works as their way to get right with God. They held up circumcision as the great symbol of fulfilling the law and being of the right lineage. Today it sounds like this, "I lived a pretty good life." "I tried my best and didn't hurt anybody." Paul warns us, *"Their destiny is destruction."*

Paul preached the Gospel to many Gentiles, yet many of them chose the things of this world and the devil's empty promises, and their sinful nature's desires and feelings, joining in sinful activities that the world trumpets as good or "my right" as a path to fulfillment. This too leads to destruction. *"Their mind is set on earthly things,"* not on God, his love, his will, or his heaven. As a wise man once said, "If you live for the next world, you get this one in the deal; but if you live only for this world, you lose them both."

"Their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame." Jesus called himself the Bread of Life, yet so many would fill their stomachs with what will never satisfy. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Paul wept over those who would not listen, those who rejected, and those who once believed but now have been hypnotized by this world's wisdom. Whether someone is living to show that their perfectly strait-laced life is enough for heaven, or they are plunging into trying to scratch their sinful itches and appetites, *"their glory is in their shame."*

"Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ." You and I can become enemies of the cross in two ways. One – you don't think you need Jesus' cross anymore. You gloss over the extent of your sins or the total corruption of your sinful nature and you trick yourself that your life is good enough. You compare yourself the less committed, the less faithful, the one who looks worse than you. You don't see your sins when you look in the mirror because you've shattered the mirror of God's law into a thousand pieces and have drawn a caricature of yourself on the wall called "Good 'nuff." This is worth weeping over. By God's grace may it be our tears rather than Paul's over losing us.

Two – you won't pick up the crosses God puts in your way that would lead you closer to Jesus' cross. God gives you moments in your life where you can live for him and turn from sin and temptation, but it would mean taking a stand on his Word, or possibly missing out on some perceived benefit – pleasure, money, honor, comfort instead of pain. We'd like to submit ourselves to God's will like our Christian role models do, but we refuse to deny ourselves. We take the blessings God and place them above him making them idols. Better to bear the

crosses now than to find yourself not even remembering His cross. We need the cross of Christ!

The cross of Christ is everything to us. It's where Jesus took my self-righteous caricature of myself and ripped it up and placed the mirror of his law up to show me just how awful my sin and sinfulness is. On the cross he wasn't cut by the glass shards of my broken mirror. He was forsaken by God the Father and made to suffer separation from God, hell for my sins – my self-righteousness and my running after this world's pleasures and idols. Jesus suffered hell for me. He opened heaven to me. He promised that because he has risen from the grave and ascended into heaven with power and authority, he will come back for me to take me there. His cross was for you too and his promise is yours too. He turns us from enemies of the cross to cherishing his cross and the ones he lays before us.

They remind us who we are and how Jesus got us there, *“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”*

III. You are heaven's citizen waiting for your Savior. You were meant for more than this world. Peter called his body a tent – a temporary dwelling. Luther encouraged believers to view our homes and places we live in this life like hotels and motels – while we appreciate them, use them, and take care of them, we aren't home yet. The church father Augustine reminded believers that our hearts are restless until they rest in our Savior. Mr. Benzing reminds our staff from time to time that while the building we take care of here is important, it's only dust. What counts is the Gospel message. We have the blessing of family names, communities we call home, addresses where we get things delivered and tell people how to find us, but where we truly belong is heaven because of Jesus.

“We eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” Our Savior Jesus Christ, who bore the cross for us with all its shame, died in our place and rose again and ascended, by that same power, will come back to bring us home. Our lowly bodies corrupted by sin, subjected to temptations, and hurts and deterioration, will be glorified – made sinless, perfect, never to decay or hurt or be corrupted. What a glorious day that will be. That's who you are. That's where your citizenship lies. By God's grace, **Live as Citizens of God's Kingdom! 1) Imitate the godly together. 2) Don't be an enemy of the cross of Christ. 3) You are heaven's citizen waiting for your Savior.** Amen.