

Text: Phil. 1:27-30

Title: "Public gospel lives"

Time: 7/25/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: John and Abigail Adams are buried at the First Parish Church in Quincy, MA. Their son, John Quincy Adams, wrote an epitaph for them that ends this way:

Married 25 October, 1764

During an union of more than half a century
They survived, in harmony of sentiment, principle, and
affections,

The tempests of civil commotion;
Meeting undaunted and surmounting
The terrors and trials of that Revolution,
Which secured the Freedom of their Country;
Improved the condition of their times;
And brightened the prospects of Futurity
To the race of man upon Earth.

Pilgrim

From lives thus spent thy earthly duties learn;
From fancy's dreams to active virtue turn;
Let Freedom, Friendship, Faith, thy soul engage,
And serve, like them, thy country and thy age.

This is important advice from a founding father, and its counsel to the pilgrim is very similar to the instruction given us as the Lord's pilgrims beginning in verse 27.

When Paul says, "Only let your conversation be," he uses a word that is related to the Greek words for *city*, *citizen*, and *citizenship*. We get our word *politics* from this Greek word.

Paul's meaning here is "only let your public life be" or to put it in the words of John Quincy Adams, "let your life as a citizen of your country and age be." God has called us to a place and a time, and in this place and at this time we have a God-ordained public duty: we must live lives that show the true worth of the gospel of Christ in a public way to a watching world. Paul goes on to emphasize two duties in this regard. Do these two things, and you will show the world the true worth of the good news that Jesus saves.

I. Actively unite with your local church (v. 27).

Illustration: A week ago my Cleveland Indians won two out of a three game series in Oakland against the Athletics. In the final game, the two players on our team who were from the Oakland area were the key to our 4-2 victory. Our center fielder, Bradley Zimmer, had three of our four runs-batted-in, including hitting the first pitch of the game for a home run, and our right fielder, Daniel "Jet" Johnson, hit a home run and made a spectacular diving catch at one point to keep the game tied.

Each of these players grew up in the Oakland area, and both were recently called up from the minor leagues, which made their performance that afternoon even more remarkable and glorious. When a baseball team can get contributions like that from unexpected places, it is a real boost to their ability to compete in the game.

Team sports teach us that no superstar player is more important than the team. In the words of legendary football coach of "the team up north," Bo Schembechler: "The team, the team, the team! No player and no coach is more important than the team."

Application: I think Paul would have appreciated the significance of a baseball performance like that, and he would have agreed with Michigan's football coach. At times Paul likes to describe our Christian duties in terms of athletics. You may remember from a few weeks ago that we looked at 2 Timothy 2, where in verse 5 Paul says that athletes must compete according to the rules to win the victory wreath in the Greek games.

The word he used there, meaning *athletic competition*, he uses here as well. It is translated *striving together* at the end of the verse. It is the same word with a prefix added, which means *together*. Paul's analogy tells us that the goal of competing in the game of Christianity is furthering the faith of the gospel, and the way to do that is to compete together on the same team as one of God's local churches.

One difference between a local church and a baseball team is that when it comes to striving together for the faith of the gospel, there are no minor leagues. Everyone is called up to the major league field. Every believer saved by the blood of the Lamb must actively unite with his local church and get in the game.

No major league team must play every game without its first baseman and left fielder because they fail to show up. If it had to, that team would never win. Paul is telling the Philippian church that the same principle applies to them. You need everyone to compete together for the faith of the gospel.

Another difference between a local church and a baseball team has to do with the glue that binds them together as a unified team. Paul mentions two specifics about the nature

of a powerful church's unity in the gospel game. I am going to call it "the glue of local church unity."

1. The glue of local church unity is one in which attitude and action are inseparable (one spirit/one mind + striving together).

With our hearts, our spirits and our minds, we unite in attitude, and with our bodies we unite in action. We cannot compete with either of these missing. If you have a great attitude, always desiring the best for the faith of the gospel at NBBC, but your body never gets in the game, that does not help. If your body is here, but your attitude is one of division and double-mindedness, then the team is hindered by your presence, not helped.

Paul says that in this game unified attitude and action are inseparably important to competing for the furtherance of the faith of the gospel. Satan is tries to stop one or both of those in the life of every believer. He can barely tolerate the fact that you believe. He cannot stand for a minute that you and I should be powerfully engaged in helping others believe.

Illustration: I was impressed last week in North Conway at the local church support for their ministerial candidate, Nathan Delavan. They sat for four hours as the council questioned their brother, and they testified to his character with loving testimony. That was one mind striving together.

2. The glue of local church unity does not depend on personal relationships to specific people ("whether I come and see you or else am absent").

Paul wanted the faith of the gospel to be the glue of this church's unity, not their personal relationship to him. He

had planted the church, led most of them to the Lord, and was cherished by the church as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Still, Paul was not qualified to be the glue of the church's unity.

Any local church whose unity is based merely on the bonds of personal relationships has a unity that is as fragile as those relationships. But when our unity is based on our common confession of the faith of the gospel, we are inseparable because that bond never changes.

In addition, when someone new comes to our assembly time, who loves Christ as we do and wants to strive together for the faith of the gospel with us, we find our hearts immediately tied to his, even though we have not known him long.

Illustration: Maureen and I experienced that bond with complete strangers last Wednesday at Calvary Baptist in Westminster, where Kent has served his internship.

II. Fearlessly prepare to suffer (vv. 28-30).

Illustration: A few of us here are horse people. It takes a special talent to work with horses because they are very large and easily startled. Those who train horses are sometimes called "horse whisperers" because it takes a certain gentle touch to put a horse at ease and make it obey. Horses are in a category of animals that are ready at any moment to run from a predator. The deer that Dixie and I see in the sand pit from time to time are designed that way. As soon as they catch wind that we are around, they dash off for the woods and hide.

Application: The word Paul uses when he tells the Philippians that it is going to be their public duty to suffer fearlessly

ly is related to the Greek word for *horse*. Literally, Paul is encouraging believers to not react like one of those animals that protects itself with a flight mechanism when confronted by an adversary or predator. Do not be startled like a horse. Do not run. Paul then tells them what the result will be when they refuse to be startled, and the reason they do not have to be startled. Let's look at those in reverse order.

1. The reason we do not have to be startled by the gospel's enemies is because the opportunity to suffer is a gift from God (v. vv. 28-29).

God is always in control when the adversary raises his ugly head, and it is God's purpose that along with the gift of the opportunity to believe, God gives us the opportunity to suffer. Believing and suffering always go together as a gift from God. As Americans, we have been able to separate these experiences in our minds. We welcome the opportunity to believe without any idea that it would involve the responsibility to suffer in any way. But believers in most of the rest of the world understand well Paul's axiom – to believe is to suffer.

Get baptized, and you will lose your family. Attend church assembly times and go to jail. Witness for Jesus and be reported to authorities. Sing too loudly and get locked down. All over the world today, believing faithfully also means suffering, just as it did for the Apostle Paul. We must not be startled or fearful as it begins to happen in our land too.

2. The result if we are not startled by the gospel's enemies is the undeniable evidence of their perdition and our salvation (v. 28b). Just like suffering is a gift from God, victory is too. God is in control when we suffer, and God will see to it

someday that this suffering comes to an end in our victory and the enemies' perdition.

So, when faith in God's sovereign control and this glorious outcome creates in our hearts a fearless response to persecution, we score big points for the furtherance of the faith of the gospel. It is an important part of this game. Everyone in the stadium watching sees evidence that cannot be denied, evidence that this gospel will save those who believe and judge those who disbelieve.

The Philippians would have known what it is like to see this evidence from the fearless response to persecution of the Apostle Paul. His first visit to the city of Philippi saw him beaten and imprisoned without a hearing, with co-laborer and partner in gospel-crime, Silas. Paul sang tenor and Silas took the melody line with a rich baritone, and they sang hymns throughout the night of their incarceration. They may have had a hymn like Isaac Watt's "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?":

"Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb? Or shall I fear to own His cause and blush to speak his name? Are there no foes for me to face, must I not stem the flood? Is this vile world a friend to grace to help me on to God? Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the price and sailed through stormy seas? Sure I must fight if I would win, increase my courage, Lord. I'll bear the toil endure the pain supported by thy word."

When the singing stopped, the Lord's kettle drums provided a punctuated ending. The ground shook, the prison doors flew open, and the suicidal jailor fell trembling before these singers asking, "What must I do to be saved?"

The gospel scored again, because Paul and Silas had prepared to suffer fearlessly.

Conclusion: As we close this morning let me read again the counsel for pilgrims from the epitaph of the Adams' tombstone:

“From lives thus spent thy earthly duties learn;
From fancy's dreams to active virtue turn;
Let Freedom, Friendship, Faith, thy soul engage,
And serve, like them, thy country and thy age.”

The best thing you and I can do to serve our country and our age is to let our lives publicly count for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Actively unite with your local church, heart and body; and fearlessly prepare to suffer. May the Lord be pleased to use New Boston Baptist Church in our time and place, as He did the Apostle Paul and the local church of Philippi in theirs. We have the same worthy gospel and the same calling to these necessary duties.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching