



Date: 01-04-2026

Text: Philippians 1:20-30 NLT

Sermon Title: Living Without Fear

When Christ is our highest value, we can face both life and opposition without fear.

What does it look like to live when Christ truly comes first?

How do we follow Jesus boldly without being reckless or fearful?

Philippians 1:20–21 NLT

For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.

Notes:

Christ as the Supreme _____

Philippians 1:22–26 NLT

But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith. And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me.

Notes:

_____ in Remaining

Philippians 1:27 NLT

Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News.

Notes:

A Call to Gospel-Worthy _____

Philippians 1:28–30 NLT

Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it.

Notes:

_____ Faith in the Face of Opposition

Reflection questions:

What currently competes with Christ as your highest value?

Where is fear shaping your obedience?

Next Steps:

Invitations:

- Re-center life around Christ, not outcomes
- Choose courage over comfort
- Live publicly aligned with the gospel

Practices:

- Evaluate decisions through gospel impact
- Stand firm with others—don't stand alone
- View hardship through an eternal lens

FEAR

Anxious dread or terror in the face of danger; also reverence to or awe of God.

Fear is a common human emotion in response to danger or the supernatural. Adam and Eve are afraid of God after they eat the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:8–10), and Jacob is afraid of Esau after he takes Esau's blessing (32:11). When the Israelites are ready to cross the Reed Sea, they become fearful for their lives as Pharaoh and his armies draw closer (Exod. 14:10). People of the Promised Land would "melt in fear 'before' " the coming Israelites (Josh. 2:9). The prophets preach that to fear God's coming judgment is a reality none could escape (Jer. 5:22, 24; Amos 3:8; Zeph. 3:7). When Tobias begins his journey, both his father and mother have parental fear for their son's life (Tob. 5:16–21). "Fear and dread" fall upon the seacoast peoples who encounter the army of Holofernes (Jdt. 2:28). When Gabriel visits Mary she is told to "fear not" (Luke 1:30). The women who find Jesus' tomb empty are seized by "terror and amazement" and are afraid to tell others of their discovery (Mark 16:8).

While "fear of the Lord" can mean outright fear of God's presence, it also means to revere God, an idea most directly expressed in the Wisdom Literature (e.g., Prov. 2:5). Fear of God is connected to keeping the law and commandments (Eccl. 12:13) and is "the whole of wisdom" (Sir. 19:20) and "the root of wisdom" (1:20). Most succinctly stated, "Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28).

To fear God, then, is to be completely devoted to his will and its rewards while knowing the awesome consequences of not fearing him. This is the background to Paul's injunction to the Philippians to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).¹

¹ Marc A. Jolley, "[Fear](#)," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 457.

Suffering:

The New Testament

In their attempts to understand suffering, the early Christians were shaped and informed by these biblical traditions already mentioned. But NT discussions about suffering are very often preoccupied with two questions—how to make sense out of the suffering of Jesus, and how to understand the suffering experienced by early Christians because of their allegiance to Jesus as Christ.

1. The Gospels. The old idea of retribution was still prevalent. God was still regarded as a good and just God, and it was believed that evil would be punished and good would be rewarded, although this will not necessarily happen within this life. In this life, one cannot assume that sufferers deserve their fate. Life is too complicated for that. It may even be true (as in the Beatitudes of Matt 5:3–12) that the ones who are blessed are the mourners, the meek, the hungry, the poor, and those who are persecuted for a righteous cause. In a corrupt world, the ones who appear to be successful may actually be the evil ones who have come unjustly to their reward. Suffering may actually be a sign that you are one of the faithful rather than being the consequence of a sinful life.

In Luke 13:1–5, Jesus would not concede that those who met unfortunate ends at the hands of Pilate or that those who were crushed by the Siloam tower were any worse than those who might have escaped. The incidental calamities of this life cannot be explained, but everyone will be held accountable in some future judgment.

In John 9, Jesus says that the man born blind was not afflicted because of some sin committed by either his parents or himself. This is a clear word of rejection of an absolutized doctrine of retribution which connects sin to punishment in individual cases of suffering.

The suffering and death of Jesus was a problem for the early Christians. The Messiah was supposed to usher in a new kingdom, not get himself killed. Clearly, Jesus did not deserve to die. Luke has Jesus tell the travelers to Emmaus that prophets have spoken that it was necessary that the Christ should suffer (Luke 24:25–26). (In Acts 3:18, Peter also refers to such prophecies of a suffering messiah.) The OT texts that come the closest to predicting such a Messiah are those in Isaiah 40–55, particularly the Servant Songs, and especially Isaiah 53. The suffering and death of Jesus thus came to be viewed as part of God's design: It was for a greater good, the salvation of the human race. Christ died for others. And, by analogy, the followers of Jesus should be willing to take up their own crosses, to be willing to suffer

for the sake of the spreading of the gospel (e.g., Matt 16:24–25). Thus the suffering of the early Christians could be interpreted as suffering for others, following the example of Jesus Christ.

Though there are characteristics of apocalyptic literature at many places in the gospels (such as the presence of demonic forces and belief in the resurrection of the dead—e.g., Mark 12:18–27 and parallels), a few passages are more obviously apocalyptic in tone (e.g., Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21). They speak of the great trauma at the end of the age when God will act decisively to end the reign of sin, evil, and suffering once and for all.

2. Epistles and Revelation. In words of comfort to fellow Christians, early Christian writers concentrated on two areas of encouragement to those who were suffering. First, they should be assured that no matter how severe they are treated by this life, the promise of resurrection is there for them. If Jesus rose from the dead, then surely the followers of Christ will also be raised into a wonderful new existence where Jesus has defeated all enemies (1 Corinthians 15). Even if some have already died before Jesus has returned, the mourners should not grieve and be without hope. Those who are alive will not be gathered to God before those who have fallen asleep (1 Thess 4:13–18). Justice will finally be done. The dead will be raised and judged by what they have done—the good to be rewarded and the evil to be punished (Rev 20:11–15, 22:12). For those who have favor with God, there will be no more tears, death, mourning, or pain. All the former things will pass away (Rev 21:4).

A second theme of good news in the midst of suffering is the assurance that God can work good even out of suffering. Therefore, it is even possible to rejoice in your suffering, with the knowledge that it will produce endurance, character, and then, hope. The one who suffers can be assured that whoever hopes in God through Christ will not be disappointed (Rom 5:3–5). Suffering can be understood as discipline, sent by God to make us better persons, just as earthly fathers sometimes must discipline their sons (Heb 12:3–11, containing quote from Prov 3:11–12).

3. Concluding Observations. (a) The NT continues the direction begun in exilic times of being less certain that God's justice will be fully executed within this world as presently constituted. With regard to suffering, this meant that people can seldom have the kind of assurance expressed by the DH, and can be skeptical about those who continue to identify cause-and-effect relationships between the sins that people do and the suffering that comes to them. Particularly, this does not work when examining the suffering of an individual person. God will still see that justice is done, although it may not be apparent in this life. More likely, it will come in its fullness either through

death and resurrection or at the Second Coming, whichever comes first. In the meantime, the faithful will have to tolerate a certain amount of suffering, strengthened in the knowledge that it will not last forever and that one day they will receive their reward.

(b) NT writings put a heavy emphasis on suffering for others as a calling for a Christian. Just as Jesus died for others, so should Christians be willing to suffer for the good of others and the spreading of the gospel. Such an explanation could be very helpful when suffering was clearly the result of a public witness to an unpopular religion; however, it might not be so helpful in explaining common, ordinary suffering that seemed not to be directly or indirectly related to any great witness.

(c) The benefit of the suffering might fall on the sufferers themselves rather than on other persons. Though suffering is, by definition, negative, it is still possible to receive some personal benefits from such an experience. As Paul says, it is even possible to rejoice in one's suffering, looking back and realizing that lessons have been learned, that humility has been realized, that hope has met response, and that God's reassuring presence has been with the sufferer even in the depths of suffering.²

² Daniel J. Simundson, "[Suffering](#)," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 224–225.