

Nothing But the Lord
February 21st, 2016

Philippians 3:17-4:1
Lent 2 C

Pastor Rob Zeratsky

Last week we took a serious look at sin and the costs involved. In a sobering display, we watched as a man let greed run rampant in his heart and that turned to theft and deceit, and that in the end brought about the deaths of nearly fifty people. But more than earthly consequences, we were reminded of the ultimate cost of letting sin go unchecked. Sin that is allowed to fester without recognition and without repentance eats away at faith like acid, like a cancer, until one day that is all that is left and our saving faith is only a memory. Sin gives birth to death. Particularly during the Lenten season, we are encouraged to take an honest look at our own sin, to remember the cost and to renew our daily struggle against it.

And though we approach this with seriousness and honesty, all is not doom and gloom. It is a battle, it is something we should face off against with proper determination, but it is not hopeless. Our Lord has already won the victory. Through our Lord Jesus and his sacrifice, we are forgiven. Through his word we have been brought to faith, made to trust the truth of what he has done for us. And through that same power he gives us the strength to live as he calls us to live. To recognize the sin in our lives, to repent of it and put it aside for his sake and our own. The final battle is already won and the daily battles are fought with God on our side.

But even though we may face each day with this determination, even though we keep our eyes open to the sin we might fall into, and even though we do this all with the confidence that the Lord himself is with us and fights for us, that doesn't suddenly make the battle go away. The selfish nature in us is still there and the devil and the world around us pull out every stop to provoke it into action. We may see the seriousness of sin and understand the need to recognize it and repent, but today let's talk about actually fighting that battle and remind ourselves of the reasons why we need to.

As we look to carry on this mission each day of our lives, the words of St. Paul to the Philippians can ring in our ears: <read text: Php 3:17-4:1>. Let's begin with the warning that Paul brings us here. Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ, and they are going to be destroyed. This is not a threat, this is not intimidation. Paul brings us these words with tears, he tells us. He wants this for no one. And by the blood of Christ, who paid for all, there's no reason anyone needs to be destroyed. So why are they? Paul tells us exactly what they give up Christ for. Their god is their stomach, their glory is in their shame, they have their minds set on earthly things.

Is that worth trading Christ for? The trinkets around you? A few moments of earthly pleasure? The secret shames we enjoy when no one is looking? Or some moments of peace and quiet because we don't broadcast our faith to those who hate God? Of course not. Nothing compares to the gift of eternity with God that we can have in Christ. Nothing, not any earthly treasure, not any moment of human life, not any human relationship is worth choosing over salvation from our God. But these are still the temptations that we are pressured with. And these are the temptations we find ourselves giving in to. How often have we had the choice between the greater good of our Lord and the temporary joy of some earthly alternative...and we chose poorly. An extra hour or two of personal time rather than time listening to him? A carnal pleasure rather than avoiding the shameful sin that hurts us? A silent approval to friends or family who live against his will rather than speaking up to defend our God?

We are frequently presented with the choice; the greater good of our Lord or a full stomach for a little while, and like fools we choose the stomach. We make earthly things our god because we want that immediate gratification or we don't want to be hurt for our faith. We want that joy now if only for a little while, thinking nothing of the consequences it will bring down the road or what we'll do when the little pleasure it gives wears off.

But what do we do? In one sense plenty, in another, nothing at all. Paul tells us here, **"...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."** (v20-21) It is because of Christ's work that we are able to do these things. We know that our citizenship is not of this world, we have been accepted as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. That is our homeland now, so it is there that our allegiance lies and it is from there that we draw our strength. That is where we look when we are tempted, when we are faced with the

choice between the Lord and our stomachs. And looking there, at the glory that waits for us, we see that there really is only one choice. It can be nothing but the Lord. When we choose him, not only do we have confidence that this glorious eternity is ours, but we also have the promise that he will give us every good thing we need here and now. Serving the Lord instead of our stomachs doesn't mean we give up all joy and happiness here and now. In fact, it means receiving joy that is better now than whatever we could scrounge for ourselves! Our sinful nature will not believe it, but the Lord's path is always better for us. It may look darker and steeper and rockier, it may look like we have to go hungry along it, but that is a lie of Satan. The Lord will always bless those who follow him, and he will always provide for and protect his own.

And all this is done for you, without your earning or deserving. It is because of Jesus, because of his payment on our behalf that we claim this great citizenship. Because he paid the price in his own blood, out of undeserved love for us, we are saved. And so all the times we've chosen poorly, the times we've failed to be imitators of Christ, it's been washed away...paid for and forgiven. The process begins with recognizing our failures. We look to the poor choices we've made and hold them up to the Lord in sincere repentance. "Lord I should not have done this to you. Lord, I have been selfish. Lord, this was wrong. I do not want to do these things again. Have mercy on me and strengthen me to do better." Approach the Lord with a contrite heart and the answer you receive from him will always be, "You are forgiven." These words from our God are the strength that lift our eyes to him. That keep our minds on our new citizenship and away from this world. These are the eyes that see nothing else in our lives but the Lord. That doesn't mean we spend all our time thinking and doing "church things". That means that his love for us pours out into every thought, every action, every decision we make as we live our lives here. The things that matter, the things that are really worth doing are the things that will carry over past this brief time and into eternity.

St. Paul told the Colossians, **"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not earthly things."** (Col 3:1-2) And that is why we willingly choose to be imitators of Christ. Not that it is something necessary to earn us heaven. Heaven has already been earned for us. It is because Jesus gave us everything that we give ourselves back over to him. And in giving ourselves over to him, in being an imitator of Christ, we are really benefiting ourselves and those around us. Our own faith will be strengthened so that we can live a life of peace and contentment, standing firm against the assaults of Satan because we have a solid foundation of God to stand upon. And those in our lives will benefit from our example. Paul tells us here to follow his example and the example of those who are faithful. Just the same, someone else is using you as an example. Sin never hurts just ourselves. Ask yourself if your example is building someone else up in faith, or is it giving them an excuse to serve their stomach because you do it too?

Build yourself up from the selfless example of Christ and the fellow believers in our lives who observe us will see you. They will see your dedication to a God-pleasing life and the true peace it brings. They will be encouraged to renew their own dedication to the Lord, just by your actions. And those on the outside will be confounded and curious. The unbeliever will look at your lives and scratch his head. "How can someone have so little care for the pleasures and the things of the world and still be so happy all the time? What does that person know that I don't?" And by God's grace it will lead that person to ask you and find out exactly what is different about you. And Christ will be shared.

"Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!" (4:1) We look to Jesus as our example of love. His sacrifice has bought us a place in the kingdom of heaven. By his death are we set free from the power of the devil and our sinful nature. We *can* live as for nothing but the Lord because of his power dwelling within us. And by standing firm in the Lord, by living that life, we don't just benefit ourselves, we can silently influence those around us, showing them by example. We do this so our family and fellow believers will be strengthened in their faith and so that those outside the church may come to know their savior. Look to the Lord, know nothing but him as your God, for the sake of your own soul and the sake of everyone around you. Amen.