

The Second Sunday of Lent

February 21, 2016

**Prayer of the Day:** Almighty God, you see that we have no power to defend ourselves. Guard and keep us both outwardly and inwardly from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Verse of the Day:** Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8)

**Sermon Text:** Philippians 3:17-4:1

What is the most important thing to do while driving? You already entered your car and buckled your seatbelt. You put the key in the ignition and started the engine. You shift into "Drive," press the gas pedal, turn onto the main road, and begin driving. So, what is the most important thing to do while driving? To continue staying on the road, right?

The Driver's Ed[ucation] instructor usually stresses being a defensive driver. That means paying attention to the other drivers on the road so that you are able to adjust your driving as needed. So, if someone suddenly brakes in front of you, apply your brake; do not carelessly zip around them. If someone at an intersection fails to see you coming and crosses your path, be prepared to stop; do not blare your horn and pick up speed. If you expect someone to cut in front of you, be ready to adjust your speed accordingly; do not use your car as some kind of battering ram to push their car off the road. Defensive driving observes how others drive so that you can safely reach your destination.

The apostle Paul gives that same instruction today. "Watch out for what is going on all around you!" Except, he is not teaching defensive driving. Rather, growing careless in what your heart truly loves can lead to eternal destruction. So, **KEEP LOOKING OUT!** *for a mind set on earthly things, for your arriving heavenly citizenship.*

This Philippian congregation was already focused on God's Word. They did not stubbornly embrace and defend some obvious sin. The Word gave them the strength to control their bodies against lust and liquor. They are not inviting random preachers to

**Philippians 3:17-4:1**

<sup>17</sup> Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. <sup>18</sup> For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>4:1</sup> 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!

stand in their pulpits and present teachings contrary to the Bible-based teachings they have learned. They **KEPT LOOKING OUT** for a mind drifting away from God's clear Word.

Just like accidents happen when drivers no longer pay attention to the road, Paul knows just how tempting it is for Christians to neglect time spent in God's Word because Christian life seems to be going well. So, he pleads: **Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you....** Let it be your attitude to imitate Paul's devotion and use of God's Word. When you hear some unfamiliar Bible teaching, dig into the Bible, ask questions, learn if this teaching is trustworthy. When your heart wanders into evil, use the Word to lead it back to forgiveness and strength for a God-pleasing life.

**For, as I have often told you before and now say 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 on earthly things.** Paul knows that many other congregations exist with many different preachers with many different messages. Some of those teachings directly contradicted what the Bible so clearly says. The goal is not to preach forgiveness, but rather declare that Jesus' death on the cross sets people free to believe whatever they want and behave in any manner they wish.

Instead of holding up Jesus as the precious Savior from sin, many change him into a good teacher who can make you rich or heal your strained relationships or end social injustice. Others find pride in the shameful acts which clearly contradict how God created bodies to function. So, abortion and same-sex relationships are declared acceptable if they do not lovingly hurt others— even though true love listens to what God says on the matter.

Not only can you hear such messages, but do you ever find yourself thinking such things? You personally know that God has established boundaries for human life and relationships. Yet, does the world's message sound somewhat tempting? That you (yourself) do not have to participate, but you can just tolerate such wicked choices. Your love for God's Word fuels your desire to keep it pure. Yet, the moment you realize that another person believes something different from you, does the world's "Co-Exist" bumper sticker enter your mind? That you could avoid any personal pain if only you listen to a sinful world tell you that some Bible teachings are not as important as others? That people only need to agree that Jesus died on the cross?

On the surface, these issues do not appear so dangerous. They appear to strengthen bonds of friendship. Yet, do you see how Paul reacts? He cries! He mourns over the fact that people love their own thoughts so much more than God's unchangeable teachings that they would label sin as good! Welcoming blatant sin declares that God should have never punished Jesus for the sins of the world! Such earthly minds demand that Jesus come down from the cross because he has no reason to ever be up there. All who follow a life contrary to the Word stand as enemies of the cross! **Their destiny is destruction!**

**KEEP LOOKING OUT** *for a mind set on earthly things!* The world will continue pressuring you to give up and compromise on your beliefs. Remember, you are not alone in the fight. Jeremiah faced death because his audience wanted to worship idols and visit

prostitutes and trust in foreign nations for guidance and protection. He preached the LORD's willingness to forgive, but the people saw nothing wrong with their lives. Jesus hears death sentences because the Pharisees rejected a Savior. They felt their best way into heaven was by doing many good things.

Both could have very easily closed their mouths, apologized, and covered up God's sheer hatred of sin. Yet, remember what is at stake here— God's pure Word— the clear Way about how you enter heaven.

So, Jesus gives everything— including his life— to keep this Word clear for you! He knew he would be arrested and could have ran away before Judas ever came. Instead he desires to do what his Father's wanted done— even if it meant being pierced, crushed, and killed for our trespasses ([Isaiah 53:5](#)). When Jesus stands on trial, he could have apologized for everything he said. Instead, he stands silent just like a lamb before her shearers is silent ([Isaiah 53:7](#)). He could have accepted the Jewish crown and ruled as King of earthly things. Instead, he gives up every earthly thing— including his life, so that he can reign as King over death and life! ([Revelation 1:18](#))

Is that not the point? Jesus does not die as some martyr for something he strongly believed in. He holds true to the Word of God so that he can gather you into his heavenly kingdom. He died because he belonged to a higher kingdom, a kingdom to which you and I belong through faith. He died to free *a mind set on earthly things*.

He dies to make you citizens of heaven. The temptation to grow careless in watching what is eternally at stake will always be there. So, **KEEP LOOKING OUT for your arriving heavenly citizenship!**

Even though the city of Philippi was nestled in Greece, the people considered themselves Roman citizens. The first century A.D. was arguably the mightiest reign of the Roman Empire. Caesar Augustus brought a few peaceful years of no wars and conflicts— something which only rarely happened in the 700-year lifespan of the empire. The economy reached heights unseen. The middle class thrived. More than that, being a Roman citizen is comparable to you being an American citizen. If a Roman was arrested by a foreign nation, the Roman Embassy would come and negotiate his release. If a foreign nation attacked a Roman city, the Empire would deploy troops to retaliate. People paid money to become official Roman citizens, just like people today pay to become American citizens. As tremendously blessed as you are to live in this great nation, your Savior has made you citizens of a far greater nation— the kingdom of 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.** As pleasant as your life might be here on earth, it will only get better! Your nation might open the doors to the pursuit of happiness, but your Savior actually gives you happiness. Look ahead to the time when sin's frustration, pain, failure, and disappointments no longer infiltrate your American life. See the new life waiting you! Cancerous tumors will be forever cured. Diseases and defects will changed into perfect health. Age transforms into immortality.

Your life will not only change on the outside, but also on the inside. The sin which waged war in the heart will be forever cast out. Never again will words stab your heart;

silence among family will be over. Never again will your thoughts stir up guilt; your words will never have to be taken back. Never again can you sin; always will your thoughts be on praising the One who has made you his own.

This heavenly citizenship is yours already by faith. Yes, you are not in heaven now. Consider this, you might have a ticket to concert and that concert might be months away. Still, you can say and know that you are going to the concert. There is no uncertainty about it. You have what is needed to enter. In the same way, Jesus has given you the ticket to the gates of heaven. There is no uncertainty about where you are spending eternity. Heaven is as good as yours right now.

So, **KEEP LOOKING OUT!** *for your arriving heavenly citizenship.* Paul knows just how tempting it is to lose sight of this. To stop coming to worship God because earthly events take its time. To stop reading the Bible because it seems like you know everything it already says. To no longer care about God's desire for you to live holy lives ([1 Thessalonians 4:1-3](#)). Spending only a few weeks outside of worship can turn into months and years. No longer caring about Satan's desire to trip you into unbelief can actually lead to unbelief.

So, **KEEP LOOKING OUT!** *for your arriving heavenly citizenship.* **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!** Look at Paul's desire to see you in heaven! "My brothers and sisters." "I love" and "long for" you. You are "my joy" and "my crown," "my dear friends." As strongly as Paul desires to know you, you are far more loved by your Savior.

So, stand firm in the Lord! Let life's true purpose be set on the life to come! Yes, on earth you have possessions and friendships and activities. Take care that these things never become your God! Remain grounded in God's Word so that your thoughts gladly follow him.

"Watch out for what is going on all around you!" Good words not only for defensive drivers, but also us Christians. Enjoy the blessings God gives you; consider it a joy to be with friends. Most of all, find your hearts true joy in God. See the awful price Jesus pays to set you free from sin. Live a life devoted to praising with thanks and shaping it by what God calls good. **KEEP LOOKING OUT!** *for a mind set on earthly things, for your arriving heavenly citizenship.*