



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

February 24, 2013

2nd Sunday in Lent

Sermon Text: [Philippians 3:17-4:1](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Jeremiah 26:8-15](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 42-43](#)

Second Lesson: [Philippians 3:17-4:1](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 13:31-35](#)

Stand Firm in the Lord

Follow the right example

Be eager for Christ

Grace and peace to you from God our Father. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Anyone else sick of snow? I hate warm weather. I'm not built for it. I hate cold weather. I guess I'm kind of out of luck until heaven comes. The only thing I ever really liked about snow was when I was a kid and they plowed the parking lot at school and they'd make those nice big hills. We have them all around here. I loved those hills because we used to play King of the Hill at recess. I'm not built for warm weather, but I am built for King of the Hill. I loved that game as a kid. You'd get out there at recess and once you got to the top, I could stay there pretty much the whole time. That was a lot of fun. You got to run into people and hit people. From a young age on, I liked that. That was fun.

King of the Hill has certain things to it. You have to get good footing underneath you, right? You want to find a spot where you can have good footing. Then you also need to be able to see all around you so you can see where people might be coming from because even if you have really good strong footing and you're looking in one direction, I don't care which kid in school came, if they came at me from behind where I didn't see them, the littlest kid in school could knock me off the hill. So you have to keep your eyes on all the threats. You have to keep your eyes in the right places.

Paul was not talking about King of the Hill when he wrote to the Philippians, but isn't that exactly what he said to them? "Keep strong footing underneath you. Keep your eyes on the right place. Follow my example," he says. "Follow my example because I'm following Christ." So keep your good footing by following the right example as you continue your walk of trying to live with your God and serve your God.

Secondly, he also tells us, "You know what? Keep your eyes on the right thing, which is to be eager for Christ's return." Don't forget about forever. If you only think about the here and now, your eyes are in the wrong place and those opponents, those spiritual opponents that are seeking to knock you off the hill that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

they are going to succeed. So he says, "Stand firm in the Lord. Here's how you do it...focus on the right examples and be eager for Christ's return." That's what we'll see this week. Next week he is going to tell us another way to stand firm in the Lord.

The Philippians seemed to have a real dear place in the heart of the apostle Paul. You could hear that, couldn't you, when you looked at that last paragraph? "My brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown." Isn't that him talking about how much he loved that congregation? They were special to him. He didn't spend a lot of time there at first. He had to move on, but that was the vision to come over. They started this congregation. He went back to it again. And then he went back to it again. I think he went back to it a third time. He spent a lot of time with them building them up. So they were really dear to him.

Evidently the Philippians thought of Paul as someone very special that they dearly loved as well because when Paul writes this letter, he is in prison. He received a gift from the Philippians that helped support him while he was in prison. This wasn't a close by thing. This was a long way away. They had to send someone to take months out of their life to take this gift to the apostle Paul. So you can see that they loved Paul too.

One of the reasons he was writing back was to thank them for the gift and to let them know how he was doing and to encourage them. He was in prison. Yet the theme of this book is "Rejoice to the Lord always; I'll say it again, rejoice." He uses the word "joy" over and over and over, which reminds us a Christian's joy isn't dependent upon outward circumstances. A Christian's joy is from being connected to Christ, but I don't think Paul was walking around in prison going happy, happy, giddy, giddy. So don't misunderstand what Christian joy is. Even in sorrow we can have Christian joy.

He also writes it in Chapter 3. He starts out first addressing those who were a threat to the people he dearly loved. He addresses the Judaizers, those that wanted to make circumcision a condition of the Gospel, that you have to be circumcised to be right with God, which Paul says you can't do because then you are taking away from Jesus did everything and you're starting to look at yourself doing something for forgiveness. Don't do that. It's all Jesus. Only Jesus. He has taken away all of our sins. It's nothing we do. So don't let these guys try to put you back under the Old Testament Law because Jesus fulfilled all that.

But then, in what I just read to you, he is addressing a second group that was a threat. One group wanted to go back to the old laws. The other group wanted to go way over here and say, "We are free in Christ. We can do anything we want. Sleep with whoever you want. Get drunk all the time. Eat, drink and be merry because God will forgive us anyhow." He is saying, "Those people are a threat to you also." If you are going to stand firm in the Lord, you have to watch out from all directions so you don't get knocked off the hill of the Gospel.

Notice that these people that he is talking about, "As I told you before and now say again, even with tears," this is how great his concern is. Paul takes to heart what we

talked about in Bible Class this morning. In the body of Christ, each member belongs to all the others. We have a responsibility toward one another. It isn't "Oh well. They are going to fall away and go to hell. That's their problem." "As I told you before and I say again now, even with tears," how deeply concerned he was that they stay connected to Jesus and the Gospel of Christ in its purity.

"As I say again, even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ." This "many" is coming from within the church, not just outside it. Within the church. "Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things." Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. Their god is their stomach is a way of saying what we often say today in our discussions, "It's all about me. If it makes me happy, if it makes me feel good, that's what's important. If it hurts you, I don't care, as long as it makes me feel good." That seems to be an attitude that our sinful nature is really prone to in today's society.

Their god is their stomach, their own desires, their own pleasures. Think about how that surrounds us today. A lot of things threaten to knock us off the hill of the Gospel of Christ by telling us things are good that God says are bad for us. That's really what Paul is talking about. Their destiny is destruction because they are doing what God says not to do and saying it's a good thing.

You don't have to think hard to think of examples of that today, do you? Go home and watch some television. There are different television shows you watch where Christianity often is attacked, but sex with whoever you want whenever you want is promoted as normal and good. If it pleases you, do it. There are some shows that I think are funny on television, but when I watch them it just makes my skin crawl over how they depict all these things. It's all around on television, right? We can sit here and get whipped up into a righteous fury at how terrible they are and how they don't understand God, but that's not what Paul is talking about only, is he?

He's not just talking about those people out there. He's talking about us, from within the church. What are things that we do that we are accustomed to doing that sometimes drive us farther away from what God wants us to do just because we are comfortable with it and we like it? If he says, "Here is how you are going to avoid giving in to what they are doing. Follow my example" because he follows Christ, we want to follow Christ. We want to follow the example of those who follow Christ. That means we are going to tie ourselves back, not just from what was done before but what God tells us to do. If God says, "I want you to be safe. I want you to be close to me. I want you to be mine in heaven. Here's how you do it," shouldn't we perk our ears up and listen? That's what he says in "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." What he says is, since we've already learned the elementary teachings, let's leave them behind and move on toward maturity so that we aren't led astray by this teaching or that teaching that comes even from within the church.

Believe it or not, this might surprise us...he says to do it all your life, not just until you are 14 and get a corsage and a gown and your name on a banner and you get your

pictures taken with all your sponsors and all these other things. He says our entire life is to be one of following the example of Paul, who got to know Christ better and better each day. It's to be a time that we do exactly what God says is continuing to grow. Spending time with Word. Spending time with him in the Word on our own. Spending time in the Word with other Christians so that iron sharpens iron, one man may sharpen another. Spending time with the Sacrament and just marveling at what our God does for us here. He takes something as simple as bread, a little thin piece of wafer, and he says, "That's my body that was given for you. It's there also." He takes wine and says, "That's my blood that was poured out for you." He gives us himself and he says, "This is for the forgiveness of your sins." I can't understand how he does that, but he tells me that's what he does. I need that so I'm strengthened because there are so many other things in life I can't understand. I can't understand why at times God's people suffer. I can't understand why we face so many difficulties and so many struggles, specifically except this in general, what God said through Paul here.

We can get tripped up if we only think of the here and now. If we only think of the here and now and say, "God, why are you letting me suffer here and now," and we say that so much and so often that we forget about God's love that has opened heaven's doors to us, we are going to be in trouble. That's why he tells us to be eager for Christ's return. Focus on the right thing. Focus on what God has done for you, through that body and blood he gave for you. Focus on what God does for you as you spend time in Word and Sacrament. That's how he is going to keep you focused on what's really important. That's how he keeps the main thing the main thing.

I can't understand why he let's suffering into our lives in the way he does. But I can understand his promises to me that I find in Scripture. You can understand the promises you find that he makes to you in the Bible. Promises that say "Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you." Promises that say "Live as aliens and strangers here because your citizenship is in heaven." Know that you are going to endure difficulty in this life, but that doesn't mean God doesn't love you. He loved you so much he died for your sins. He loved you so much he gave you the Holy Spirit to believe his promises. He loves you so much that he longs to keep giving you the Holy Spirit so that you find strength and you find joy even as you face those challenges that come in life.

But he tells us again and again and again the only place we are going to find that joy and strength is in Word and Sacrament. That's why he tells us so often in Scripture to crave pure spiritual milk. Leave behind the elementary teaching. Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. Let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching. Even in that phrase, he is pointing out to us that our citizenship isn't here. Our citizenship is in heaven.

If we keep our eyes in the right place and are eager for Christ's return, we'll be able to get through all the challenges of life that are trying to knock us off the hill that is Jesus. You and I doubt it at times. You and I worry. You and I struggle. We are sinners. But don't make excuses for your sin. Confess your sin to God because God is eager and

willing to say, "I forgive you for your sinful worry. I forgive you for your doubts. I'm just ready, willing and able to help make you stronger." He pleads with us, "By all means, use the tools that I tell you to use...the Word, the Sacrament." Amen.