

March 4, 2007
Lent 2

"Standing Firm in the Hope of a Bodily Resurrection"

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-4:1

Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ 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. ^{4:1} 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!

Tonight on the Discovery Channel there will be a documentary with the strange title, "The Lost Tomb of Jesus." The producer, James Cameron who made the movies "Titanic" and "Terminator," suggests that a tomb discovered in Palestine in 1980 contains the bones of Jesus along with the bones of other family members, including Mary Magdalene his wife, and a son that Jesus had with her. These ideas come from ancient Gnostic texts already present in the early centuries of the Christian church. These Gnostic writing challenged the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and his bodily resurrection from the dead.

Jesus died with a physical body. Rose with a physical body and is coming again with a physical body. This belief is the foundation of the Christian faith. The bodily resurrection has been compared to the post on a clothesline. If it falls over then all the clothes fall to the ground. Everything we believe and hold as valuable hinges on the reality of the bodily resurrection. It is the lynchpin of our whole existence. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15 that if Christ is not raised then our faith is futile and we are still in our sin.

In the words just read to you, the Apostle Paul calls on his dear Christians in Philippi, whom he called his joy and crown, to stand firm in their hope of a bodily resurrection on the last day. This would keep them from being deceived by the world around them and by false teachers who were already threatening the infant church with their ideas that Jesus did not bodily rise from the dead.

What Paul told these people is intensely practical for our every day existence in this present age. If we are going to protect each other from being molded and shaped by the world around us, then we need to lock arms together and stand firm in the hope of our bodily resurrection on the last day. Our citizenship is in heaven and that profoundly affects our worldview and how we live our lives each day this coming week.

The world wants your body to fit its mold

Paul is not bragging and boasting when he calls on his dear Christian people to follow his example. "Join with me in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live

according to the pattern we gave you.” If you are just learning the game of golf, it might help you to pay close attention to someone who is very good at the game of golf. You will try to mimic that person, and swing the way they swing. What Paul had going in his life had nothing to do with his effort. It had everything to do with God’s grace and mercy in his life. Listen to how Paul described the change that had taken place in his life earlier in this chapter. “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for Christ. What is more I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.”

We want to be like Paul in our beliefs. Get rid this awful belief we had from birth that we can follow our own feelings and depend on our own goodness to be spare us from the judgment to come. That is pure rubbish. Seal it in a plastic bag. Take it out to the trash. Haul away and bury it. I want it out of my life. Instead I want to be in Christ, covered with his righteousness. All of these blessings of being forgiven, and being at peace with God, and covered by Jesus righteousness are real to us this morning because Jesus rose bodily from the dead. It was the heavenly Father’s way of saying, “I have accepted what my Son has done for the whole world. It is real. It is yours.”

Just as Jesus had tears over the city of Jerusalem, Paul had tears for the people who once believed all this but then were formed and shaped by the world around them to go back to their old ways. “For 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 their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.” The enemies of the cross of Christ are not just the people who blatantly reject Christ and his resurrection such as James Cameron who has produced the documentary we referred to earlier, or Ron Brown who has produced the book *The Da Vinci Code*. Anyone who tries to add Old Testament laws, or human rules and regulations, or even feelings and emotions as being something necessary for Christ sacrifice to be complete has denied the faith and turned their back on the benefits that come with Christ’s resurrection. Their destiny is destruction. In the earlier part of this chapter Paul called these people dogs, not the nice pet dogs that you have in your family, but the kind of wild dogs that roam the streets and terrorize people.

Paul also adds that their god is their stomach. In the light of what he has said earlier, he is talking about something far more dangerous than eating too much food. He is talking about following the appetite of the emotions and feelings that lead you in the wrong direction. We are living in a culture where people are prone to determining right from wrong not on what God tells us in his Word but on their feelings. Newscasters lead us to believe that the most important question to be asked after a major disaster is “How do you feel about this?” Follow your feelings. Follow your heart. Advertising agencies attempt to sell us products by manipulating our feelings. Even on a popular television show such as “American Idol” there is concern that the people vote as much with their feelings as they do with their evaluation of the music. It even happens with presidential candidates. When it comes to the important matter of salvation and escaping the judgment it is a total disaster to make important choices on the basis of feelings and emotions. That spells

disaster. Their destiny is destruction.

The night Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his disciples and said, "Peace be to you!" That peace was not based on some warm fuzzy feelings that he was trying to develop in his disciples by being in their presence. It says, "Then he showed them his hands and his side." The resurrected Lord Jesus Christ showed the nail prints in his hands. This was the supreme evidence that the work of forgiving sinners had been completed. The result of seeing the risen Christ and the nail marks created tremendous emotion and feeling, not as the source of salvation, but the result of completed work of Christ. "The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord." Stand firm. Don't let the world try and mold you back into its pattern that takes your eyes off of Jesus' resurrection and redirects you to look inward to yourself.

Jesus wants your body to fit his mold

To find the strength to stand firm in these last days, the Apostle Paul calls on Christians of every age to lift their eyes up to see the resurrected bodies that some day he will mold and shape for us in the place he has prepared for us. Just as God created Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, the Lord Jesus will transform our lowly bodies so they will someday be like his glorious body.

We are told, "Our citizenship is in heaven." The Christians living in Philippi were part of a Roman colony, citizens of Rome, living in Greece with all the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship. We are citizens of the USA and we enjoy the many privileges of being part of this land. Our real, lasting citizenship is in the place Jesus has gone to prepare for us, our home of righteousness, the place where God will wipe away all tears from our eyes, where the Lamb of God in the midst of the throne will take us to springs of living waters.

The reality of this heavenly citizenship creates in us a living hope that sustains us in the most difficult times of life. Romans 5 tells us that we can "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" and that hope will not disappoint us. 2 Corinthians 4 tell us, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." Or listen further to what Romans 8 tells us about the profound effect our future has on our every day existence: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worthy comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us." And to this list we can add the words of 1 Peter 1, "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you... In this you greatly rejoice though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials."

It is no secret that Christians have buried their dead with the hope of a bodily resurrection on the last day. Visit the Catacombs of ancient Rome where Christians were buried over the dead bodies of the heathen Romans from previous centuries. Their tombs were engraved with palm branches and religious symbols and words that spoke of a far greater victory to come in the bodily resurrection. Our text tells us, "We eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies so that they might be like his glorious body." Listen to how this transformation is described in 1 Corinthians 15: "For the

trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality." We stand firm in the Lord by keeping in mind what we will someday be.

A few weeks ago we opened our worship by singing a hymn that had these opening words, "Rejoice my heart be glad and sing, A cheerful trust maintain, For God the source of everything. Your treasure shall remain." How can you stand firm and maintain a cheerful trust when life is not going that well? I believe we have the answer before us this morning. It is the hope of a bodily resurrection on the last day. When we think of how Jesus will someday mold and shape our lives in his glory, it molds and shapes what goes on our heads and in our hearts as we focus on our hope of eternal glory. In 1899 a famous Christian evangelist Dwight Moody was dying. As he was dying, his dear daughter Emma prayed at his side for his recovery. Moody said, "No, no, Emma, don't pray for that. God is calling. This is my coronation day. I have been looking forward to it." Shortly after he was received into glory. It is not just in the last hour of life that we look forward to our bodily resurrection. We stand firm in that hope every hour of our lives here on this earth. Amen.