

Citizens of Heaven, Stand Firm

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[0 : 00] Chapter 3 of Philippians, beginning in verse 17, going down to chapter 4 and verse 1.

! And now tell you, even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word.

Would you please be seated? One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Exodus chapter 4, verse 20.

[1 : 25] Many of you probably aren't aware or familiar with that verse, but there in Exodus chapter 4, verse 20, it says this, So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey and went back to the land of Egypt.

And Moses took the staff of God in his hand. So let me backtrack and let you know a little bit about what has happened. If you've read the book of Exodus, certainly if you know who Moses is, you're aware of the events that happened prior to this event that I just read to you.

Moses was born in the land of Egypt during a time where the Egyptians were oppressing the Hebrews. They were taking their sons and they were casting them into the Nile River. And so Moses, wanting to spare her son's life, again, God's hand, his sovereign hand was over him from before he was born all the way through his life.

Put him in a basket, sent him down the Nile River where Pharaoh's daughter found him, eventually adopted him as her son. Later on, and when Moses was an adult, he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating one of his Hebrew brothers.

And so he murdered that man. And then he was escaping as a fugitive from Pharaoh, from Egyptians. He went to the land of Midian where he found a wife and where he became a shepherd and where he lived to be to about the age of 80 years old, thinking that all that God had planned for him or had prepared him for had led to this.

[2 : 54] He was just going to be an old man in the wilderness as a shepherd. And then God appears to him in the burning bush. And so I love this passage because Moses had the odds stacked against him.

God wanted to send this man back to Egypt to deliver his people. And if anybody had the stack stacked against them, it was Moses.

Moses was rejected by his adopted family for murdering that Egyptian taskmaster. He was rejected by his own people, the Israelites, because they viewed him as being an outsider.

He wasn't a young man. And again, he was 80 years old when God spoke to him out of that burning bush. And so I want to say, too, if you think that you're too old here for God to use you, you better think again.

Because time and time we see in Scripture that God uses both the young and the more seasoned to accomplish his will. Moses was an old man. He didn't have the energy that a young man had, yet God still chose him.

[4 : 02] He also had a speaking problem. He had some kind of a speaking problem or speech impairment. You can probably find copies today of Charlton Heston reading the Bible. And you know Charlton Heston is famous for playing Moses.

Well, Moses did not have the voice of a Charlton Heston. He was insecure about the way that he sounded. We don't know what he sounded like, but it was something that he was uncomfortable with.

And he did not want to speak publicly. And yet, despite all of these things, this man whom God chose to go back to Egypt to deliver his people was this broke-down old shepherd running from the law, a fugitive.

And so you think, what is God doing here? Why would he use such a man to accomplish such an important task?

It goes against what we think, right? I remember being a youth pastor. They would tell us a lot of the strategy was this. Go into the schools and get the quarterback of the football team and get the cheerleading captain.

[5 : 13] And if you get them to come to your church, if you get them to come to your youth group, you're going to get a whole lot of other kids. And so the strategy was appeal and witness and get the popular kids to come to your youth group.

And if you do that, all the rest will follow. The problem with that is that that is not a strategy that God ever employs. If you read his word, you see that that's clearly the case.

Often, in fact, he chooses the weak. He chooses the outcast. He chooses the forgotten and overlooked kid who always gets picked last for team sports.

God doesn't need us. He doesn't need us. But he chooses us anyway. And he often uses the weak in order to shame the strong.

So here he is. Moses. An old, broke-down shepherd. Fugitive of Egypt. Filled with all kinds of insecurities. Minding his own business.

[6 : 14] And God says to him, Moses, I'm not finished with you yet. I've got a plan for you. I've got a task that I want you to set out upon.

I love this verse because of all that God supplies Moses with to go back to Egypt. In fact, I love it because of all the things he doesn't supply Moses with as he sends him back to Egypt.

Think about it. God doesn't send him with an army. He could have. But God doesn't send him with an army. He doesn't even send him with a small band of tough guys. Some rough riders.

Some outlaws. Some mighty men like David had. He doesn't even do that. He doesn't even send him with a bodyguard. Some muscle.

You know, the intimidating guy who stands behind you and just flexes his muscle and looks tough. That the people who you're speaking to know that you mean business. And maybe you aren't tough, but you've got somebody who's got your back.

[7 : 12] He doesn't even do that. He doesn't even send him with a powerful weapon. Like a sword. Like an Excalibur. That shines brilliantly in the light. That causes people to be in awe and fear.

He doesn't even do that. He doesn't even give him a powerful steed to ride upon into town. He gives him a donkey and a staff.

He's an old man with an old wife and his two kids and a donkey and a stick. And that's it. Why does God do that?

Well, because I think he's showing to Moses and he's showing to us that God doesn't need to give us those things. That Moses didn't need those things from God in order to deliver God's people back to him.

Moses would be the instrument through which God would accomplish that task. But make no mistake again that God didn't need Moses to do this. He could have used the donkey that he was sending Moses with to do this.

[8 : 17] God didn't need Moses to accomplish this. There was nothing about him that would indicate that he would be up for such a great task. But God called him. God sent him.

And God enabled Moses, despite all of his insecurities, despite all of his weaknesses, to stand firm. And it was ultimately God who delivered his people from the bondage of slavery.

When Moses asked God, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out? It's interesting what God says to him in reply.

He doesn't say, hey, well, Moses, look, you're perfect for this situation. You're familiar with the people of Egypt. You know the culture. You know who to talk to. You probably have some old connections you could get in touch with that could get you to Pharaoh.

Listen, you're really able to do this. God doesn't give him any of those kinds of pep talks. God simply says to him in reply, I will be with you.

[9 : 18] That's all you need. To know that I will be with you. Despite your iniquities, despite your inabilities and your weaknesses, I, the Lord God, will be with you.

That's all you will ever need. Because God would be with him, he could stand firm against Pharaoh. Because God would be with him, he could face those great odds, great doubts, and great fears, and be victorious.

Because God would be with him. God told Moses exactly what would happen before he even sent him out. Remember? He tells him, Pharaoh is not going to let you go.

In fact, I'm going to harden his heart. But I'm telling you this, you will deliver my people. And on this place where you stand right now, one day, you will be back with my people, having accomplished what I am sending you out to do.

So in Exodus chapter 5 and 6, Moses does go back to Egypt with all of those things. His wife, his kid, his donkey, and his stick.

[10 : 33] And in the midst of this conflict with Pharaoh, Pharaoh intensifies his persecution of the Israelites. He's not happy that Moses is there. He's not happy with what Moses is asking him to do.

God has, in fact, hardened his heart. And then when Pharaoh intensifies his persecution of the slaves because of Moses coming to him and speaking to him, Moses gets upset with God.

And he regrets that God ever sent him. And he asks God, why did you ever have me to do this?

And you remember what God says to him in reply? He says two things to him.

He says, first of all, I am the Lord. He reminds Moses of who he is. And secondly, he reminds Moses of his promise that he's made.

And so in Moses hearing those two things, he remembers, one, I am on God's side. And two, God has promised. And God has the power to do whatever he has promised to do.

[11 : 36] And that is exactly what happened. So what does any of that have to do with our text today? Well, if you remember two weeks ago, we learned from this text that as citizens of heaven, living on the earth, we have a great promise from God, a great reward that is awaiting us when the Lord returns.

Remember, the Apostle Paul says, we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and he will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him to subject all things to himself.

So you see, we have a better Moses. We have a greater deliverer. We have one who has set us free from the bondage of slavery to sin.

He is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. And by the indwelling of the Spirit, we are enabled to become even more and ever more like him in this life until that day when he returns and we receive fully the prize that we've been pursuing, which is to become like him.

He said he'd do it. He died on the cross and he rose from the dead just as he said, and so we know that he has the power to do all that he has promised that he would do.

[13 : 07] And so when we read that verse as a Christian, as a believer in Jesus Christ, you can take it to the bank. You know that that day is going to be a day where you will receive that tremendous prize.

It will happen. And so we must stand firm. Thankfully, God has equipped us with all we need to stand firm in this life.

Because until that day comes, we are caught in the midst of a conflict. Every Christian in this life faces three enemies. We face the enemy of our flesh.

We face the enemy of this world, this evil world system. And thirdly, we face the enemy, Satan. These three enemies all Christians face in this life.

And they get in the way of us trying to pursue the goal of becoming like Christ. But again, thankfully, the Lord has equipped us with the things we need in order to stand firm against these enemies.

[14 : 19] No matter how ill prepared we feel, no matter how wimpy we feel at times, as we fight this good fight, we have a promise from God that the victory is assured and that we can stand firm.

Let's look at Romans 8, 30 through 31. There it says, And those whom he predestined, he also called. Those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? What's Paul saying? Simply, he's saying this. If God is for us, it doesn't matter who's against us.

You believe that? You see that? If God is for us, it doesn't matter who is against us because there's no power who is equal to him. There is no power that is greater than him.

And if you are with God, then God is for you. You will be victorious when that day comes. You will receive this great prize. Let's look at Romans 8, 28.

[15 : 21] And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. And so here we see that we who believe have been called to salvation by God according to his purpose.

So for the believer, this means that whatever trial you face and are called to endure in this life, God has a purpose for it. God has a purpose for you in it.

God brought you to it and God will bring you through it. Now that sounds like a catchy preacher term, doesn't it? And I almost didn't do it because I don't like using those catchy preacher terms. But isn't it true? Paul knows this himself. He said it in Philippians 1, beginning in verse 18. He knows this to be true. He says, Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance.

Remember, he's in prison. He's a prisoner. He's in chains. He's in Rome for the gospel. And he knows that whatever happens, this will turn out for his deliverance.

[16 : 25] And he continues in verse 20. As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. So Paul understood this. God had brought him in this sovereignty to this place and God believed in his sovereignty he would deliver him one way or another.

Either he would be released from prison and he would continue his gospel ministry or he was going to be delivered from his prison cell by death. One way or another, he knew that God was with him as he was going through what he was going through.

Either way, he understood that God brought him to that point and one way or another, God would deliver him from it. So he was able to stand firm in faith and trust in God's sovereign will.

Here in chapter 4, verse 1, Paul calls the Philippians to stand firm in the Lord. He's encouraging them. He's exhorting them. He's challenging them.

[17 : 40] He's pleading with them. Stand firm in the Lord. Why? Why do we need to stand firm?

Well, the Bible says that the church is always under assault. And if the church is always under assault, that means that the children of God are also always under assault from those three sources, those three enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The world with all of its allurements endeavors to bait and entice believers. But the Bible says in James 4, 4, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

It also says in 1 John 2, 15, if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. The flesh refers to our fallen nature. Jesus said in Matthew 26, 41, keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Energizing both the world and the flesh is the devil who, 1 Peter 5, 8 says, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking to devour.

[18 : 57] The world is tempting. The flesh is vulnerable. And the devil is lion-like in his aggression. As a result, church life often involves a great amount of instability.

As we'll see, next week was the case here in Philippians. They had some conflict. And Paul's going to deal with it. But before he does so, he reminds them of who they are in Christ as citizens of heaven that they must stand firm.

Because harmony in the church is critical. And it exists only because of our common bond in Jesus Christ. Christ, but it's continually being threatened from those, not just outside of the church, but those who occupy the pews.

You and I. As we'll see next week, this church was dealing with one of those kind of internal conflicts. Two of its prominent members had conflict with one another, and that was threatening the harmony of the church and their unity.

And a church that is divided will not, will not be effective in its gospel witness. How could it be? Many churches spend more time and more energy and more passion debating things like whether or not we use hymnals in worship.

[20 : 28] We spend more time, we spend more energy, we spend more passion debating on whether the color in the carpet should be green or red or purple or orange or who knows what. You name it.

We spend more time, energy, and passion debating over getting rid of things that we'd never use anymore. In fact, some of them are broken, but they hold sentimental value.

We can't give up those types of things. We debate over these things and other ridiculous things. Meanwhile, as we're wasting time doing that, people are perishing, having never heard the name of Jesus Christ.

What is more important? What is more worth our energy? What is worth more of our time and our passion? Too often, churches stand firm for the wrong things, having become distracted from their true mission by the world, by the flesh, and by Satan himself.

So, we must stand firm in order to be the church that the Bible calls us to be. That's why. How about how?

[21 : 36] How are we going to do that? How are we going to stand firm so that those enemies aren't able to distract us from our mission? Well, here's the main idea for this morning's sermon.

Citizens of heaven are to live in unity with their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. This is only possible when the church stands firm in the Lord.

A church that lives in unity and stands firm in the Lord will demonstrate the beauty of the gospel to its community. So, how are we to stand firm in the Lord then?

Well, first of all, from Scripture, we see that standing firm in the Lord means that we stand firm in the Lord's strength. We stand firm in His strength. We cannot resist the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil in our own strength.

We will be crushed. We will be defeated. We don't stand a chance. But when we stand in the Lord, we do. Not because of who we are, but because of who He is.

[22 : 43] And when I think about this, I was reminded of Acts chapter 19, verses 13 through 16, another passage of Scripture that I love to read. There we find the story of the seven sons of Sceva, if you've heard of them.

They were men who attempted to cast out evil spirits from a demon-possessed man, but they were not in the Lord. They had not believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And it does not go well for them when they try to do that.

Let's read what happens. Acts chapter 19, verses 15 through 16, these men standing in their own power trying to do the Lord's work. But the evil spirit answered them, Jesus, I know. And Paul, I recognize, but who are you?

And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them, and overpowered them so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

These guys in their own strength tried to do something that they were not capable of doing and they literally, literally got the pants beaten off of them. It is impossible to tap into the Lord's strength if you aren't in Him.

[23 : 53] And if you aren't as a Christian abiding in Him. John MacArthur said, ultimately, Satan's power over Christians is already broken and the great war is won through Christ's crucifixion and resurrection which forever conquered the power of sin and death.

However, in life on earth, battles of temptation go on regularly. The Lord's power, the strength of His Spirit, and the force of biblical truth are required for victory.

You see, when you feel weak, when you feel powerless, when you're struggling with doubt and you're anxious for answers, the answer when you're in that situation is not to turn and look to yourself for strengthening.

The answer is to turn to the Lord. We'll get there eventually in Philippians chapter 4 verses 6 through 7. Let's go ahead and read it.

What do we do when we feel this way? Paul says, do not be anxious about anything. About anything. But in everything. By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Jesus Christ.

[25 : 16] Most of you by this time, unless you're like my grandmother, have a cell phone. And you know that when you have a cell phone, eventually, the battery runs out.

Right? And I think there's a scam because they try to get you to buy new phones by having your battery become harder and harder to charge as it goes along. Right? So I'm kind of mad at Apple is what I'm trying to say with my phone.

But you know what I'm saying. It battery runs low and so what do you have to do when the battery runs low? You have to charge it. You have to plug it back in.

Yeah, or you buy a new phone. But for the sake of this illustration, you have to plug it back in in order to charge up its battery. We know stuff like that.

So I'm trying to use that illustration to say that if you aren't in God's word, you aren't abiding in him. You aren't abiding in Christ. You will struggle to stand firm.

[26 : 16] You will constantly feel weak and wimpy and powerless when God has given you his word to build you up, to teach you, to strengthen you so that you can do the work that he's called you to do.

So the answer in this case is not to look to yourself, not to look to some other kind of self-help book, but to plug back into the Lord. Plug back into his word.

Plug back into his power. Plug back into his strength. Be in the church. If you're outside of the church as a Christian, you're eventually going to run out of power.

You're going to run out of strength because that is not the place that God has for you to be. We need each other to be used by the Lord to help equip and strengthen and encourage one another. So stand firm in his strength. Secondly, what it means to stand firm in the Lord is that we stand firm in the Lord's wisdom. We stand firm in his wisdom. God doesn't look at life the same way that we do.

[27 : 24] He declares in Isaiah 55, 8, for my thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

You see, God's word is a rich source book of paradoxical statements and it stands to reason that if there is a God in heaven, he would look at things differently from us, from a different vantage point, from a different perspective that results in paradoxes for us, statements that appear to be contradictory but in actuality are true.

For example, according to the wisdom of God, the Bible says that we see unseen things. We conquer by yielding.

We find rest under a yoke. We reign by serving. We are made great by becoming small. We are exalted when we are humbled.

We become wise by being fools for Christ's sake, the Bible says. We are made free by becoming bond servants. We gain strength when we are weak.

[28 : 40] We triumph through defeat. We stand firm by depending on Jesus Christ. We live through death.

death. We are to stand firm in the Lord's wisdom which contradicts the wisdom of the world. Again, going back to Philippians as a reminder, chapter 2, verses 1-5.

So, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourself, which is yours, in Christ Jesus. You understand, when we live in such a way, we will demonstrate the power and the beauty of the gospel to our community.

[29 : 45] Going back to the Engage event that we're going to hold on August 4th. It's a free carnival. Everything is free. And the only thing I'm going to ask for those who attend is that they ask somebody in a red shirt why you're doing this.

My hope and my prayer is that somebody comes to you on that day and they're going to ask you, why are you doing this? And I hope your answer has something to do towards this effect.

Obviously, I hope that you share the gospel with them. But our generosity provides us the opportunity to proclaim the gospel. Our generosity provides us with an opportunity to proclaim the gospel.

Our kindness to the people of our city is only a dim shadow of Jesus' great kindness towards us.

Our hope is to create in our community a hunger for the gospel and the things of Jesus Christ.

That when people see us and the way that we interact with one another on that day and the way that we interact with them that they would see these are a generous and loving people. Why is that? And they would understand that it's because we serve a generous and loving God who gave his

only son to die on the cross for our sins that we might have eternal life.

[31 : 06] So stand firm in the Lord. Stand firm in his strength. Stand firm in his wisdom. Stand firm in the Lord's word.

This one is breaking my heart. And I wasn't going to share this this morning and I don't want to say too much besides I have a friend who has been used by the Lord significantly in my life to disciple me and help me grow as a Christian.

He and his wife. For years I've known them. When I was called to the ministry he was one of the only ones besides my parents who actually believed that I had been called.

And he gave me opportunities to serve with him. And I love this man. And I love his wife. And I love their family.

Years have gone by. I haven't seen them but I found out recently that he and his wife are getting a divorce. This beautiful Christian family and the reason why they're getting a divorce is because they simply say their relationship dissolved.

[32 : 44] Where is that in Scripture? If a husband loves his wife like Christ loved the church and a husband loves a wife loves her husband as she does the Lord relationships don't just dissolve.

and it's heartbreaking not just that but other instances where they they posted on Facebook and people comment and there are other people who I believed were Christians as well and they're encouraging and they're saying all these things no let's pray for them that they'd be reconciled let's point them back to God's word.

That's just one case so many people who claim to quote from God but they're not using Scripture. Scripture it's their feelings and it's their opinions that are dictating to them what is truth.

I've been wrong I've thought wrong my feelings are often and have often been misguided I can't allow those things to tell me what is true I can't depend upon those things God hasn't told me to depend on those things for truth right?

He's given me his word he's given us his word so my question to us as Christians is do we believe it's God's word or not? We don't stand above God's word and authority over it we stand under it and what it tells us this is true this is what we believe this is the light that gives us light to walk in this sinful world John 8 31-32 Jesus says if you abide in my word you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free God's word sets us free because it's a lamp to our feet a light to our path I'm telling you your emotions and your feelings and your opinions can be wrong and are often wrong don't allow those things to be your guide in this world our guide is God's word and we must live in submission to it and call others as

[35 : 01] Christians to do the same in love in love not beating each other up and saying hey I'm better than you but because we love them because we care for them because we know that these enemies are real and they want to destroy us they want to cause disunity in our church we can't allow it to happen and we won't when we stand firm in God's word and then fourthly stand firm in God's love it's clear that Paul loved these people does he challenge them yes does he say things to them that are hard for them to hear absolutely we'll get there next week but why does he do that because he loves them because he views them as his family he calls them brothers these are more than just acquaintances or people that he sits next to in church they are his family do you see that as a church we're a family he says that he loves and longs for them suggesting that his instruction isn't given to beat them down but to lift them up to encourage them he he them his joy and his crown because they were proof that his efforts to spread the gospel were successful and seeing them pursue the goal of Christ likeness brought him much joy and so

I'm telling you these things because I hope and I've said it before and I'm going to explain what I mean by it again church is a place where it's okay to not be okay now what do I mean by that well what I don't mean is that it's a church where it's okay to do whatever you want live however you want say however you want live in sin do whatever you want no big deal it's okay to not be okay here no what I'm saying is this is a place where we come acknowledging our need for a perfect savior and that we aren't perfect we go through difficulty in life we go through dry spells with the Lord it's hard to live this life as a Christian and so what it means is that when you're struggling with sin when you're struggling with doubt when you're struggling to stand firm you need to let us know that you've got to let us know that because we as your church it's our job to encourage you to pray for you and to disciple you because we all need

Jesus because we are all sinners saved by grace so if you're not okay and if you're struggling I want to hear that our leaders need to hear that the people in our church need to hear that so that we can

talk about you or gossip about you so that we can pray and encourage you and disciple you and that's what you need there are plenty of people around you here today look around I know that forward and someone will follow you down here if you see somebody coming down for prayer this morning then you follow them down and you be the one to pray for them don't be afraid to admit your need to receive love and encouragement from your church family because that's part of why we are here the Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect example ultimately of what it means to stand firm he endured he was tempted in all things as we are yet without sin he faced more severe trials than any believer ever has or ever will but for the joy set before him our Lord endured the cross despising the shame and has made atonement for our sins and on the third day he arose from the dead Jesus is the true and better Moses who stands in the gap between people Lord and who mediates a new covenant which he ratified by his blood Jesus is the real Passover lamb innocent perfect slain so the angel of death will pass over us he is the true temple the true prophet the true priest the true king the true sacrifice the true lamb the true light the true bread he is the way he is the truth he is the life do you know that do you believe that today is that your confession and if you don't or you hadn't but the Lord is drawing you to himself today to believe that to know his son as Lord and Savior then as we have have our invitation him I invite you to come down come down that we can pray for you so that we know that we need to encourage you and disciple you in your walk with Jesus Christ and celebrate what God has done in bringing transformation to you so that you can stand firm in this world Thank you.