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Reading: Philippians 1:27-30

Title: Deeper Joy: Living for Jesus in a Hostile World

## Introduction

I'd like to start by addressing all the Australian citizens in the room. If you're an Australian citizen, I've got a question for you: what are your responsibilities and obligations as a citizen of Australia? If you aren't sure, don't worry. I consulted the official handbook this week.

It says, quote: 'All Australians are responsible for respecting and protecting our country.' It then lists some of Australia's *values* which you're expected to uphold. They include:

- Constitutional government.
- Freedom of speech and religion.
- A spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect, tolerance, fair play, compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good.

It also lists your *obligations*. As a citizen of Australia there are four things you must do: Obey the law; Defend Australia should the need arise; Vote in federal and state elections; Serve on jury duty if called to do so. Hopefully this hasn't come as a big shock to you. Actually, I think we're incredibly blessed to live in a country where those are our values.

But now, I've got another question. This time, not for the Australian citizens in the room, but for those of you who are citizens of heaven. What are your responsibilities and obligations as a citizen of heaven? Do you know?

## Living as Citizens of Heaven

The reason I ask you that is because in verse 27, Paul says, 'Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.' Or, to translate it another way, '*Live out your citizenship* in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.' The word for 'conduct yourself' is a political word. It has to do with being a good citizen. The Philippians might have been thinking, Okay, we need to be good upright members of society in our city of Philippi. But look at what Paul adds: 'in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.' A little later, in 3:20, Paul puts it like this: 'Our citizenship is in heaven.' He's saying, Christians have dual citizenship. Here on earth, you may be a Philippian, or an Australian... but you're also a citizen of heaven! *And if you're a citizen of heaven, then you need to live like one.*

Not so that you can earn your way to heaven. No, your citizenship was a free gift. It was through grace. That's what the gospel of Christ is all about! By nature, we are all citizens of the dominion of darkness, living in Satan's lair where we love sin and hate God. But this is the amazing news of the gospel, Colossians 1:13: 'He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.'

Christian, that is who you are! That is where you belong! That's where your citizenship is! In the kingdom of the Son. The city of heaven. When you die, that's where you'll go. The doors will swing wide open and the citizens of heaven will say to you, 'Welcome home! You don't have to live out of a suitcase anymore. You don't have to be homesick anymore. You're home.' Won't that be glorious?

Now let me ask you this: *if that's who you are, if that's where you're heading, if you're a citizen of heaven... then how should you live while you're here on earth?* In fact, how do you want to live, in the days leading up to that glorious arrival?

I've been loving the Olympics over the past couple of weeks. One of the things that has struck me is how each athlete wears a special uniform with particular colours that tells us what country they're from, and they wave a particular flag, and they sing a particular national anthem. It's this constant reminder that these athletes are not just individuals... they represent a whole nation. When you wear the green and gold, you're representing Australia, and the way you behave says something about all Australians.

And here's the thing: our athletes don't do their best so that they can *become* Australians... no, they already are. They do their best because they want to do us proud, they want to bring home gold, they want to put on a show of good sportsmanship so that we say, 'Yeah! That's what it means to be Australian. We do our best, we treat others fairly, we strive for excellence. That's what we stand for as a country.'

And in this passage, Paul says that if you're holding a certificate of citizenship with 'Heaven' written on the front, if you have a gospel passport with the blood of Jesus stamped inside, then that will change the way you live *right now*. You don't wait till heaven to start living for Jesus. Last week, pastor John opened up the verses before this where Paul says, 'For me, to live is Christ.' In other words, I want to exalt Christ in everything I do. And now he's saying to the Philippians, you should live like this too.

I think it's really interesting to learn what people thought about the first Christians. In Australia, we're used to the fact that some people are Christians... but back when the church started, followers of Jesus were a curiosity. Here's one quote describing how they lived. '*While they dwell in Greek or barbarian cities... and follow the customs of the land in clothing and food and other matters of daily life, yet the condition of citizenship which they exhibit is wonderful and admittedly strange... They spend their existence upon earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, and in their own lives they surpass the laws. They love all men, and are persecuted by all.*'

I love that phrase, 'wonderful and admittedly strange.' Because in one sense, we are just like other people. Going to work, shopping at Woolies, playing footy, paying our taxes. And yet in another sense, we're completely different to the people around us. Totally different values, strikingly different morals, different understanding of what life is all about.

It reminds me of what happens when you take a glass of water... and you add a few drops of oil. What happens? You get this one body of liquid, mixing together... and yet the oil is always distinct and separate from the water. *In the world, but not of it.*

And if you've been a Christian for long, you'll know that living like this is often really difficult. Having your heart in heaven and your feet on earth... can be difficult. Living for Jesus in a world that hates him and rejects him... can be difficult. We've already seen in the letter of Philippians that Paul has been facing opposition because of his faith... and now we're going to find that the Philippians have the same struggle. They're copping it. They're struggling. And they're wondering what's gone wrong. They became followers of this amazing loving grace-giving king called Jesus... and now all of a sudden they feel like drops of oil floating in an ocean of water. Rejected, separate, weird. What's going on? What should they do?

That's what Paul wants to talk about here in verses 27-30. Actually, in the Greek, this passage is just one long crazy sentence. It's the first time in the letter that Paul has directly addressed the Philippian's situation. Up till now, he's been mostly talking about his own situation. But now he turns his attention to them and gives them a command.

And it begins with these dramatic words: 'Whatever happens.' Or literally, 'only this.' If you know the TV show *Kath and Kim*, this is Paul saying: 'Look at me. Look at me. Now I've got one word to say to you.'

One thing matters: *live for Jesus*. Go all in for Jesus. Live as people of the gospel. Live as citizens of heaven. But how? How can we live for Jesus in this world where we don't belong and we're often opposed? That's what we want to think about now. How do we live as *residents* of Launceston but *citizens* of heaven? In the rest of Paul's huge, long sentence, verses 27-30, he tells us how.

Read verse 27 with me again: 'Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you *stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.*'

Let's break this down. There's three things in here. First, standing firm in the one Spirit. Second, striving together for the faith of the gospel. And third, not being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. We're going to take these one by one.

### 1. as citizens of heaven, we must stand together as one

How do we stand firm and solid and stable when things get tough? When you just want to run and hide, when you want to give in, when you're weary, when you're discouraged, when it's too hard. Paul says, the only way forward is together. Look at how strongly he emphasizes unity here: 'stand firm *in one Spirit, striving together, as one.*'

Rudyard Kipling was an English author, famous for writing the Jungle Book. This is one of his poems:

*Now this is the law of the jungle  
As old and as true as the sky  
And wolf that keep it may prosper  
And the wolf that shall break it must die.  
As the creeper that girdles the tree trunk  
The law runneth forward and back:  
The strength of the pack is the wolf  
And the strength of the wolf is the pack.*

It's true, isn't it? We need each other. Our church community here at Riverbank isn't just some nice social club, a little extra thing that Jack and John invented cause they thought it might help... just if you want, just if it suits you. Imagine going through the Christian life alone! Some of you

have experienced that. Maybe some of you feel like that right now. It's brutal. It's lonely. We need each other! We're stronger together!

But how do we do this? How can we be a united church? How are we meant to be *as one*, when we're all so different – different ages, personalities, interests, educations, ethnicities? When the person next to you annoys you? When the person behind you has a totally different idea of what this church needs?

Look at what Paul says: 'Stand firm *in the one Spirit*.' The Spirit. The Holy Spirit. The Spirit that lives in every single believer here. The same Spirit: in you, and you, and you. The same Spirit who lives in Jesus, and unites us to him, even though he's in heaven and we're down here. The Spirit who unites us to each other at the *deepest* level. All of us, sinners who deserve God's wrath. All of us, forgiven by Jesus. All of us, odd balls who've been adopted into the same family. All of us, headed for heaven where we'll spend all of eternity *together*.

I want us to stop for a second and see something super important. Paul just told us to do something, didn't he? Stand firm. And then, in the same breath, he told us *how we can do it* through the Spirit. If you want to learn to read your Bible better, here is a piping hot tip. Whenever God calls you to *do* anything, learn to ask, *How?* How can I do this? And then look at the text in front of you for the answer... and I guarantee that every single time, you will find that *God always provides what you need*. The answer is never, 'Figure it out yourself. Use brute strength.' The answer is always: God's grace, God's power, God's love, God's enabling, God's Spirit. If you start looking for this, you will start to see it *everywhere* in Scripture... and it will refresh your soul.

And that's what we see here. A call for us to be united... with the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us do it.

The idea of 'standing firm' is a military image. It's reminds us of Roman legionnaires, who developed an amazing battle technique. They would advance forward in a line, each soldier holding a long shield that made one impenetrable wall. And the soldiers behind would hold up their shields as a roof. And then they would march forward into battle, impervious to the enemy's arrows and spears.

One commentator sums it up well: 'Don't let the opposition divide you! Instead, let the pressures from your opponents draw you together in a deeper and stronger unity!' If we're going to weather the storm that is brewing out there, if we're going to live as citizens of heaven in a world that rejects us, then we need to stand together as one... majoring on the majors, putting aside our petty selfish differences and realizing that we're all brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ!

What do you do when someone at work gives you a hard time for your faith, and all you want to do is hide away and never mention Jesus again? You share it with your Growth Group, and your brothers and sisters pray for you, and encourage you, and message you during the week to tell you they're thinking of you.

What do we do when someone at church has different ideas than us, or disagrees with us, or annoys us. We talk together as brothers and sisters. We try to understand their point of view. And we pray together, not that their will would be done or my will be done, but *His* will be done.

Is that what people in Riverbank do when things get tough? Because that's what it's gonna take if we want to make it.

So first, as citizens of heaven, we must stand together as one. Now second,

## 2. as citizens of heaven, we must strive together for the gospel.

Verse 27: 'stand firm in the one Spirit, *striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.*'

Remember, we're citizens of heaven, we're people of the gospel. So what do people of the gospel do? Paul says, they strive together *for* that gospel. We don't just sit back in the trenches, sipping tea and waiting for the war to finish. We strive, we fight, we work. We pour ourselves into the things that really matters.

Do we still go to work? Do we still hang the washing? Do we still work hard at school? Do we still need Christian accountants and rubbish truck drivers? Of course! But everything you do now becomes *infused with gospel intentionality*... like when you eat so much garlic that the smell of it seeps out of your skin for the next week. The gospel seeps out of you. Everywhere you go. Everyone you meet. Everything you say.

For some of us, we might still do exactly the same work we were doing before we discovered Jesus... but now we approach it from a different perspective. You're still a full-time mum, but now you're mothering for Jesus. You're still a plumber, but now you're plumbing for Jesus. How can I live for Jesus in this place? How can I help the people around me meet him and learn to appreciate him? How can I bless these people? How can I show them Jesus' love? How can I share truth in this context?

For others of us, striving for the gospel might turn your whole life upside down. There are some in this church who Jesus may be calling to leave Launceston and take the gospel to the nations... to be a missionary in another culture, another country, another language. There are some in this church who Jesus may be calling to completely change their retirement plans, so that they can invest their time and money into a life-changing gospel ministry. There are some in this church who Jesus may call to die for him, literally martyred for their faith.

Will it be worth it? How could you ever give up so much? Because your citizenship isn't in Australia. Not really. Your security isn't your friends and family. Not really. Your life isn't even your own. Not really. Christ is your life. Heaven is your home. The church is your family.

Well, so far we've seen that as citizens of heaven, we must stand together as one... and we must strive together for the gospel. Now third and finally,

## 3. As citizens of heaven, we must suffer together with courage.

Verse 28, Paul says, *Don't be frightened in any way by those who oppose you.* We don't know exactly what opposition the Philippian church was facing, but we can imagine how scary it would be to be threatened with legal action, or imprisonment, or execution.

And yet Paul says, you don't need to be frightened *in any way*. Why? Because, v28: 'This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved – and that by God.' The fact that these Christians are facing persecution, and yet are still standing united and striving for the gospel without fear... That's a sign, an omen, an evidence.

To their opponents, it should be a terrifying sign, something that makes them stop and think. I mean, what a striking witness! These people can't be intimidated by anything. They're willing to die for this person called Jesus. They're remarkably united in the way they love and care for each other. And even towards us they're not aggressive... in fact, they love us and do good to us. What does a persecutor think when he sees someone living like this? 'What is it about these people?'

Maybe they've got something I don't. Maybe this Jesus guy was right. Maybe they're saved, and I'm not.'

So Paul says, Your gospel courage is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but it's also a sign to you: *a sign that you will be saved*. What goes through your head when bad things happen? 'Maybe God is displeased with me. Maybe he's punishing me. Maybe he's forgotten about me.' Paul says, Actually, it's the exact opposite. Your suffering for the gospel is a proof that you really are a citizen of heaven.

Have a look at Paul's remarkable words in verse 29. 'For it has been granted to you' – that is, it has been *graciously given* to you – 'on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.' What a gift, hey? Faith... and suffering. Why would God give suffering to the people he's saving? Why would that be a good thing?

Well, notice the emphasis in verse 29. 'It has been granted to you *on behalf of Christ*, not only to believe *in him*, but also to suffer *for him*.' See how Christ is the key? He's the Saviour, who we believe in. Absolutely. But he's also the Sufferer. And if we're going to follow him, we will also suffer. How can you be a follower of Jesus, if you aren't willing to go where he went? That's literally the definition of following!

There are Christians around the world today who are being persecuted and martyred for their faith... just like Paul, just like the Philippians. It's horrible. And yet, Paul says, it's also normal. Following Jesus isn't like a video game where you get to choose your difficulty level before you start. 'I think I'll just play on easy today.' No, suffering comes standard. It's part of the base model.

But in God's grace, suffering is actually a good gift from his loving hands. It's through suffering that we draw nearer to our Suffering Saviour. Suffering makes us more appreciative of what he went through on the cross for us. Suffering stops us getting too comfortable on earth, reminding us that heaven is our home. Suffering exposes our selfishness and sin. Suffering provides those precious moments when we experience God's nearness and help more clearly.

Here in Australia, we don't suffer in the same way persecuted Christians in other countries are suffering... but every one of us will pay a price if we truly commit to living for Jesus.

When I arrived in Riverbank 6 months ago, I was so excited to read your Vision 2030 document. It is so precious to see a church that says: 'Lord, we're scared, and we're sinful. Maybe we haven't been very good at this in the past... But *we want to strive for the gospel here in Launceston*. We want to reach lost souls that are hurtling towards hell. We want to plant churches and shine the light of Jesus in this city.' Let me say this loud and clear: this Vision will involve *enormous sacrifice*. But really, is there anything more worthwhile than striving for the gospel? As people of the gospel, is there anything else you'd rather be doing?

## Conclusion

If you're here today and you're not a follower of Jesus, you might be thinking, Why would you guys choose a life like this? Why would I choose a life like this? It's a good question.

I mean, why is it that Christians are willing to be different, and hated, and even killed? Are they just crazy? Just weirdos who enjoy suffering? Or could it be that they've found something incredibly precious, worth living for and even worth dying for?

Maybe it's just simple math, business 101. Ask any successful businessman, or Olympic athlete, or parent... Is short-term pain worth it for long-term gain? Of course. Would you give up your life to save it? Of course. Would you be willing to suffer for someone you love, for someone who loves you? Of course.

If you're a Christian, here's what I want you to take away today: *Go all in for Jesus, because he went all in for you.* We've got an awesome God, a church community filled with the Spirit, a message worth dying for, and a home in heaven with our Saviour. *So Riverbank, let's go all in for Jesus.*