

Philippians - Part 7

The Practice of Standing Firm While Running

Philippians 4:1-9

Memory Verses: Philippians 4:4

MANUSCRIPT

The Set Up: Let's talk about two people... Jesse Owens and Rosa Parks. Both famous, and both will go down in history as being extraordinary people who advanced the cause of black people here in America. Jesse Owens is of course famous for his track and field achievements, most notably, beating the Nazis on their home track in the 1936 Berlin Olympics and winning 4 gold medals. As Hitler was promoting aryan supremacy, and after proclaiming that his white athletes could not be beaten, Jesse left them in the dust, literally!

Rosa Parks is of course famous for sitting in the front seat of a Montgomery, Alabama bus in 1955 and refusing to give it up to a white person. This brave act made it's way all the way to the Supreme Court and led the way to ending segregation in America.

Both famous, both for similar reasons, and at the same time very different actions. Jesse famous for moving fast, Rosa famous for refusing to move. Jesse famous for running, Rosa famous for taking a stand.

Now think of this... what's if we had told Jesse to take a stand and not run. In fact there were many who were telling him to do that exact thing and boycott the olympics to make a point. But had Jesse stood firm instead of running we wouldn't know about his amazing accomplishment. His stand was stronger by running. Or what's if we had told Rosa to run instead of taking her stand. If she had given that seat away... well segregation could have lasted a lot longer.

Where am I going with this? What is my point? The point is simple. You can make a difference by running... and you can make a difference by taking a stand... but you can't do both at the same time... or can you?

Series Recap: We are in a series where we are going through the book of Philippians and looking at the them of joy. Philippians is the book of Joy. We see the words rejoice or joy 13 times in these 4 short chapters. Every time we look at a passage, we see that we are called to life changing, circumstance ignoring joy in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Week one we saw that we could find this joy by serving others in ministry. Week two we saw that we could find this joy by fighting for the cause of Christ in spiritual warfare. Week three we saw that we could find this joy by humbling ourselves and being unified as a church. Week

four we saw that we could find this joy by shining the light of Christ in the darkness. Week five we saw that we could find this joy by relinquishing our resume and depending upon the resume of Christ. And week 6, last week, we saw that we could find this joy by running after a prize worth pursuing.

Let me say that again; last week we saw in the word of God in the second part of Philippians chapter 3 that we find joy and purpose by running after a the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ. Just as Paul, we are called to press on, strain forward, run after the prize of Jesus. So we run. Now I want you to keep your mind there. Like Jesse Owens running to win the gold in front of Hitler, the enemy of the world, we are called to run to win the prize of Christ in front of Satan, the enemy of the universe. We run.

The Struggle: But... in our passage today we see this. Look at **Philippians 4:1**. Therefore. When we see a therefore in the Bible we need to look at what it's there for. What was Paul just talking about? Running! We run for the prize. And so now he's saying this, "since we are called to run for the prize... stand firm! Take a stand like Rosa Parks... be unmovable, unshakeable, unflinching in the face of the enemy. Take your stand for Christ, and don't be moved! Since you run like Jesse, be unmovable like Rosa.

How can we run and stand firm at the same time? They are pretty much opposite actions. If I run I can't stand firm, and if I stand firm I can't run. Is Paul confused? Have we finally found a contradiction here in the Word of God? Of is it possible that we can both run and stand firm at the same time?

As crazy as it sounds, this is actually not a paradox. This morning I want you to know that the Christian life is both a race to run and a rest to stand firm in. I want us this morning to learn how to practice running while standing firm. You see, there is a secret to the Christian's joy. And, it's this; Jesus lives in us, and in a way runs for us, and if we are to lay hold of his life it is necessary that we stop trying to run the race ourselves, but allow him to run it in our stead. So we stand firm in Christ who actually runs our race.

The Secret to Running the Christian Race is Keeping a Firm Grip On Christ Within.

The perfect illustration for this would be the tow rope that I would have to hold on to in order to get back up the hill when I used to go snowboarding. Here's a video to help you see what I'm talking about. **(Video)** You see... there is a destination to get to... the top of the hill. There is a race to run to get there.... but I can't get to the top of the hill riding a snowboard. I have to grab the rope that is pretty much running the race for me and let it carry me to the top. In order to grip the rope, my feet have to be firmly planted. I'm standing firm, but I'm ascending the hill... because I'm gripping the rope. This is a beautiful picture of what Paul is saying, for

though we are running the race of life we are continually confronted with the obstacles, demands and pressures that come upon us. The answer is not to not necessarily do something about it ourselves, but to get a firmer grip on the life of Jesus Christ, which is capable of doing it in us. As we do that, we discover that he is quite able to overcome anything that the race of this life can throw at us.

So once again, this morning let us practice running while standing firm in Christ. And we will see that he pulls us through the struggles of this life we may encounter along the way. **The Secret to Running the Christian Race is Keeping a Firm Grip On Christ Within**. Let's begin by reading our passage in it's entirety; **Philippians 4:1-9**.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

So the first thing we see here is that you can **Stand Firm As Christ Leads You Through Disagreement (vs2-5)**. Here we have Euodia & Sythyche, two sisters in Christ who are at odds with one another. Now it's not uncommon for two people, even in church, to disagree with one another... but this disagreement must have been so divisive that Paul had to address it, and not just address it but specifically call out these two sisters. He's basically saying, your disagreement has spilled over into the church and is affecting the whole thing... so now we all have to get involved.

How did these two women, who are faithful believers commended by Paul, fall into such division with one another? Well we don't know the issue they were divided over... but we can guess. Perhaps it was a personal preference issue, or a leadership issue. Whatever it was doesn't matter as much as how Paul addresses it... how are we gonna fix it. You see, disagreements between believers should not lead to disunity. Paul pleads with these two sisters. It says he entreats them or urges them to come to an agreement, not on their situation but IN THE LORD. Meaning we can agree to disagree on this, but we must show that we are in agreement in Christ, which is the most important thing. Have the same mind in Christ, have the same love for one another, the same theological doctrines, and the same philosophy and methodology in the church. Be unified in these things... and if you disagree in something else... well that isn't such a big deal. They were making a big deal over something that wasn't a big deal. Get this... **you can differ on secondary issues but you must agree on the core issues that bring unity in the church**. By standing strong in Christ (depending on him to help you keep unity in the midst of disagreement) you will come to realize that Christ is your all you need for true unity. Hold tightly to Christ and he will keep you unified.

So how do we hold tightly to Christ in the midst of our disagreements? Paul gives us some tips. First, in **verse 3** we see that

we should allow the church to come along side of you and help you resolve the situation. Paul calls for the others in these ladies small group to come alongside them and help them fix their disagreement. They are to pray for them, and encourage them, and counsel them, until the divide is mended. So often people in the church say, it's none of my business. Paul is saying, what effects two of us, effects all of us. So here Paul says, get involved.

Don't let your fear of meddling keep you from seeking to resolve disunity in the church.

Second, Paul says in **verse 4** that we are to rejoice in Christ. Turn you focus from what you disagree about and rejoice in what you share in Christ; salvation, freedom, holy spirit, etc...

And what happens when we do these things and reconcile our disagreements? When you stand firm in Christ as the thing that brings unity your disagreement will dissolve and the community will see that you are not divisive and dis-unified, rather they will see that you are, according to **verse 5**, reasonable, teachable, and approachable. **The Secret to Running the Christian Race is Keeping a Firm Grip On Christ Within**

The next thing we see in this passage is that you can **Stand Firm As Christ Carries You Through Anxiety (vs5-7)**. Listen, we all worry, we all struggle with stress and anxiety. But worrying and being anxious does nothing to help the situation. Look at **Matthew 6:27**. So stop working yourself up into a frazzled mess of worry and fear. Instead escape anxiety by gripping tight to Christ. Look at **5b**. Recognize that the Lord is at hand. This means, know that God is in control. Take a step back, know that there are bigger things at work here then the situation you are focusing on, know that God is the creator and sustainer and that he's got this. Like Peter walking on water, when you take you eyes off of the storm and focus on Christ you can make it... when you focus on the storm instead of Christ you can sink. Next in **vs6** Paul says to pray. Let the lord who is at hand know how he can help. When you are anxious pray, and the Lord who is at hand will help you with your situation. He's right there, standing by, waiting for you to invite him into the situation and take control. Sometimes he takes control and fixes everything, sometimes he just fixes your mental. Look at **verse 7** **when you pray, God might not take away the problem, but he will give you peace**. So, stand firm in Christ, depend on Christ in prayer, and he will carry you through your anxiety so you can keep running the race. **The Secret to Running the Christian Race is Keeping a Firm Grip On Christ Within**.

And then the last thing we see is that you can **Stand Firm As Christ Guides You Through Uncertainty (vs8)**. No doubt we live in uncertain times. As we just saw, we get anxious, we get nervous, and we want solutions. So what do we do? We watch the news and we get frustrated.

We get on social media and we get depressed. We end up dwelling on all the negative things don't we? But in **verse 8** Paul calls us to lift our minds to a higher plane and instead of focusing on the negative, think on the positive. We are to have a God focused perspective which is positive, rather than a world based perspective that can be very negative at times.

He gives us a list of things we can think on. Think on things that are true like God's love, and God's promises. Think on things that are honorable like your family and your friends. Think on things that are just like God's word. Think on things that are pure like Christ's sinless life. Think on things that are lovely like the church family. Think on things that are commendable like those helping the poor and struggling, like those on the front lines against this virus, etc... Think on things that are excellent and praise worthy like the many blessings God has given to you personally today and in the past. He is faithful. When we grip Christ and think on the positive instead of dwelling on the negatives we escape uncertainty. God is faithful and in him there is no uncertainty. The point is this... **what we think matters more than we think**. **The Secret to Running the Christian Race is Keeping a Firm Grip On Christ Within**

Application

So how do we apply this today? Look at **verse 9**. You've seen Paul stand firm in Christ as he's run the race so do what Paul has done and commanded of us today.

You've seen Paul stand firm as Christ has led him through disagreements and disunity! Remember when Paul was upset with John Mark and it actually split his missions team with Barnabas departing with John Mark and Paul going with Silas. Remember when Paul was frustrated with Peter and had to rebuke him publicly. By gripping tightly to Christ Paul was able to easily reconcile with those dear brothers.

You've seen Paul stand firm as Christ has carried him through anxious times. When he was shipwrecked, beaten, imprisoned... Paul kept his grip on Christ and you can too.

You've seen Paul stand firm as Christ has guided him through uncertain times. When he was up for execution and didn't know if he would live or die? When all of his friends were dying and the church was being persecuted. But he kept his grip on Christ.

And so we see that we are to... practice these things – practice standing firm while running! **Practice depending upon Christ to help you run the race that you can't run by yourself**. **The Secret to Running the Christian Race is Keeping a Firm Grip On Christ Within**

Conclusion

Think again of the Tow Rope that pulls you back up the snowboard hill. What happens if you let go of the rope? You fall all the way back down the hill, taking out everyone behind you in the process. Not only can we only run the race by standing firm in Christ, but if we choose to lose our grip on Christ we will fall flat on our face and possibly destroy the lives of others in our church, and families as well in the process. There's a lot riding on the fact that you keep your grip on Christ. So grip Christ hard! Right?

And here we come to another paradox. I am not strong enough to grip Christ. There's now way I can hold on to him hard enough to have him carry me up the hill. If we are depending on the strength of our grip we are in trouble, we must depend on Christ's grip on us. I came across this quote and I love it. **"It is God's grip on me not my feeble grip on him that keeps me safe in the fold of his love"** - Diana Stone. So I run by standing firm, I stand firm by letting go. **We have our strongest grip on Christ when we let go and allow him to grip us**. **The Secret to Running the Christian Race is Keeping a Firm Grip On Christ Within**