

Fil-Am Community Church

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Key Verse: 1 Cor. 15:58

“BE STEADFAST”

Tomorrow is Veterans Day and we are honoring our men and women in uniform who have fought and are fighting for the cause of freedom and liberty in this country. Today, in this church, we have some veterans. If you are a veteran, whether you're active or retired, young or old, please stand because we want to acknowledge you and we want to thank you for the very valuable service you've given to this country. (Ask people to look at them and say “Thank You”) We won't enjoy freedom were it not for you. Your resolve, your perseverance, your fighting against all odds are qualities that are worth emulating. And these are qualities which I would like to talk about in today's message.

Today I want to give a message that is directed toward people who call themselves followers of Jesus. As I look at the crowd this morning, I see many of you are veteran Christians. You may have lost your hair but you haven't lost your first love. And your hair may have turned grey like mine, although they're invisible at the moment, but you haven't turned away from the Lord. Now, some of you are not yet veterans but just starting in the service, so to speak. Let me tell you, it will be a joyful and challenging one.

As we know, following Jesus is not easy. He made that clear. “If anyone would come after, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”. This morning I want to talk about persevering in the faith. Continuing to be strong despite hardships and difficulties. Overcoming discouragement. In short, being steadfast.

We’re on the third part of our series on “Following Jesus”. We’re looking at what it means to follow Jesus.

We learned that it means counting the cost. Then, separating ourselves from the world. Today, we’ll look at being firm and steadfast. In writing this message I have borrowed the outline of Jake Hanson, a preacher in Birmingham, Alabama, and have used some of his thoughts as well.

You know, there are moments of weakness when I wonder if it is worth it to live the Christian faith in full obedience. There are times when I wonder if what I am doing for Christ has any value or worth. When I became a Christian, it seems like I have experienced more troubles than when I was still unsaved. There were people who persecuted me. Friends have left me. I wasn’t immune to job loss, sickness, worries, depression. And so, there are times when I wonder if a life of sin, where I let my passions run wild, is not more enjoyable than the life of righteousness. Is all this hard work against sin worth it? Is all this service for the kingdom worth it?

And I do not think that I am alone. Many of you also wonder. Is this all worth it? Indeed, sometimes I look at people living in sin, and wonder, with the prophet Jeremiah and the Psalmist who wonder the same thing: “Why, Lord, do the wicked prosper while I suffer and toil?” And I am tempted to

take off my breastplate of righteousness, and take on a cloak of wickedness. To set aside the life that God has called me to.

Then, I am constantly reminded of this verse from 1 Corinthians 15, verse 58 which we will look at this morning. Read this verse with me.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”

(NKJV)

Two questions immediately come to my mind as I reflect on this verse. Why should I continue to live a life dedicated to the Lord? And perhaps a more difficult question: How can I, in the midst of suffering and pain, continue to follow Jesus?

I find the answer to these questions in this chapter. Verse 58 begins with the word, “Therefore.”

Whenever you see the word “therefore” in the Bible, you should ask, “What is the word ‘therefore’ there for?” In this instance, it points us back to the previous verses of this magnificent chapter. And in this chapter, we find Paul’s great explanation of the event and the meaning of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this chapter, we read in verse 3 and following *“that [Jesus] Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, [and here is the important part] and that He rose again the third day...”*

Which brings me back to my question: Why should we continue to live a life dedicated to the Lord? The answer is because Jesus is alive, and so those who put their trust in Him are also made alive—made to live forever, in new, resurrected bodies which are not subject to sinful passions and sickness and disease and death.

In short, we serve a living Lord. Someone who is in heaven and watching over us. He is not some ancient founder of religion whose skeletons are in the grave. His tomb is empty. His presence is real. All the pain, the sorrow, the hardships are worth it because he is real and he cares for me. As the Bible says in 1 Peter 5:17, “*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*” (NIV)

And my other question: How can I, in the midst of suffering and pain, continue to follow Jesus? Let’s look at the succeeding verses to answer this question.

The first answer is stated by Paul in verse 58:

I. Be Steadfast, Immovable

In other words, “Be firmly established. Do not be moved” from where you are in the faith.

Now, these two words, and words like these, are used constantly throughout the New Testament. “Stand firm,” we are told. “Be established.” “Be rooted.” There are multiple images in the Bible of being immovable from the faith.

Colossians 1:23 uses these same words. Let me read from verse 21:

*“21And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—23if indeed you continue in the faith [and here come our two words] firmly established and **steadfast**, and **not moved away** from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven...”*

You see, the Colossians were people who were being moved from the hope that we have in Jesus in one major way. A way which also threatens to move us from this same hope if we are not careful. I'm talking about being moved from the Gospel by a different Gospel. Teachings which are not true.

There are, right now, some religious organizations who call themselves "Christians" but actually are not.

They think they are Christians and has even the word "Christian" in their church names but they are deceived and are deceiving people. Years ago, I encountered a guy in a train and he said he was a Christian, he belonged to the Boston Church of Christ, and we exchanged our stories and all that. Until we came to the subject of salvation and I realized that he had a different understanding of Scripture. I then sensed he was trying to convert me to his way of thinking. Basically, the Boston Church of Christ believes that apart from receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior, one must also be baptized by immersion to be saved. This, of course, is not what the Bible teaches. I found out that they have branches all across America and they are distinguished by the appending the name of the city where they are located like Philadelphia Church of Christ, Los Angeles Church of Christ and the like. As a whole, they come under the umbrella of an organization called "International Church of Christ".

Paul was so zealous in protecting the truth that he warned the Galatians, *"But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!"* (Gal. 1:8 NIV)

This church is actually considered a cult by many evangelicals because of some of their aberrant beliefs and ungodly practices.

Another thing that can move us away from the hope we have in Jesus is our lustful passions. In this same book but in an earlier chapter, Paul talks about being careful that we don't fall. He says in 1 Cor. 10:12 (NKJV), *"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."* He is referring to falling into temptation. Prior to this, he was talking about the sins of idolatry and sexual immorality that the Israelites have committed while wandering in the desert.

Christians are always under attack. The enemy, Satan, would like to see us fall. For we become ineffective when we fall. Our testimony suffers and we can even be a disgrace to our Lord. We hear of some high-profile evangelical leaders who have succumbed to the temptations of the flesh and money. Paul is saying, "Be careful. Be steadfast. Be immovable. Don't be swayed."

Peter also tells us in his first letter, that you must *"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith"* (1 Peter 5:8-9)

You see, our character and faithfulness to the Lord is measured by our reaction to temptation.

I read the story about how Cecil B. DeMille, the producer of great biblical movies like *The Ten Commandments* and *Samson and Delilah* gave Billy Graham a blank contract to star in his biblical movies. Billy has the blank contract in a frame in his home. He did not take the offer. He said, "I

have a much greater purpose.” Billy was not moved by this temptation. He could have been a star but he gave it all up for his faith.

But there are times when you will feel alone. Like you’re fighting the enemy alone. You’re not.

Your brothers and sisters in Christ are just a phone call away or a text away. I’m sure they will rush to your aid if you feel like falling down or giving in or giving up. They will help you to be steadfast and continue to fight.

Let me show you a video to just illustrate the power of others coming alongside you to encourage you.

This is an autistic man singing the national anthem at Fenway Park in Boston during one Disability Awareness Day.

VIDEO

<http://www.godvine.com/Autistic-Man-Singing-National-Anthem-Gets-Some-Help-407.html>

That is what you can call a stirring rendition of the national anthem. Wouldn’t you be stirred as well when brothers and sisters in Christ join together with you to help you be steadfast?

The second answer to how we can follow Jesus in the midst of pain and suffering is to

II. Always abound in the Work of the Lord

“Always abound” is to “overflow continuously” in the work of the Lord. It’s like a river that continuously flows, never-ending. What a difficult command! It’s like when Jesus commands, “Be ye perfect!” I mean, don’t we

get a vacation or a break from doing the work of the Lord? And can't we just do a good deed here and there and get by? Yes, we can take a break every now and then. Otherwise, we will suffer burn-out. The point Paul is making is that a follower of Jesus should not stop doing ministry. He or she should not give up.

Don't you think that it is odd that Paul writes this command and this verse to the Corinthians, of all people? I mean, I could understand if he were writing to a pastor, or church leader. But he writes to the Corinthians these words. In this long letter, he had laid out what type of people the Corinthians were, and the issues in the Corinthian church. There were fights and divisions and tensions in their midst. There is a man in the church who had been sleeping with his father's wife. There was drunkenness.

The Corinthians were even abusing the Lord's Supper with gluttony, drunkenness and even greed. Their worship services were out of control with abuses of spiritual gifts.

It is to *these* people, regular, sinful people like you and me, that Paul writes, be "always abounding in the work of the Lord".

We are tempted to believe that "the work of the Lord" is reserved for pastors and preachers and teachers and apostles. But even if we look at chapter 16 of Corinthians, we see a list of people doing the work of the Lord. Timothy, Apollos, Stephanas and his family, and Fortunatus and Achaicus, and Prisca and Aquila.

The work of the Lord is for us all!

Listen to these words from Titus 2:

11For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, **12**instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, **13**looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, **14**who gave Himself for us [**and listen to this**] to redeem us from every lawless deed, and **to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, [people who are] zealous for good deeds.**

As you work for the Lord, I know it can be discouraging. You may feel tired, you may not get appreciated, or you may not get enough help. Remember, however, that Jesus himself, your master, experienced the same thing.

In our service to the Lord, there are two things I want all of us to understand. First is that we do not need public recognition for the things that we do for the Lord. We are not serving the Lord so that we might have the praise of men. No, you might not have the fame and the glory serving the Lord that you would anywhere else, but the benefits are out of this world. We do not need recognition.

Some things we do might be obvious to all people, but some things may never be seen by anybody.

There are many people who will never know the things that are done by people. Nobody will ever know how much time Kuya Rey has spent handling the church finances. Nobody will ever know how many hours others have spent loading and unloading church equipment. Nobody will ever know the late hours people have spent on the phone trying to talk to people about the Lord. No one will ever know the generous giving of some

people in the church like... Today, if you are discouraged because people do not know what all you do, you are in the wrong place. We do not seek praise from men. Recognition from men means nothing in the long run. I think it is important to give honor where honor is due and to recognize the servants that we have among us at times, but a lifetime may go by and no one will ever know the things you did. That does not mean that you are not valued or important to the Lord.

Which brings me to the second thing, God sees all we do. We must realize that God sees all that we do for him, whether it's little or much. I want to encourage you that though nobody may ever give you recognition here God sees your faithfulness. God sees and knows how much money, and energy and hours you sacrifice. God sees all that you do and you can be encouraged to know that you will be repaid and rewarded for what you have done. We do not need to seek praise from men, but we store up treasures in Heaven.

Which brings us to another point in this message. As you follow the Lord in the midst of pain and suffering by being steadfast and abounding always in his work, know that

III. Your Toil Is Not in Vain in the Lord

Your toil is not worthless in the Lord. Toil means hard, painful work. If you choose to follow Christ, many times it will feel like hard work. Always fighting against the sin that so easily entangles you.

Always, having to keep your wits about you to look out for danger, and to be alert for the devil who would like to sift you like wheat. Always fighting

against the waves that you might stand firm with the Lord Jesus Christ. But take heart my brothers and sisters. Your toil, your fighting, is *not* worthless because the Lord Jesus Christ is your rewarder.

Paul speaks a lot of things being worthless, or in vain, in this chapter. He warns the Corinthians in verse 2 that, the Gospel of Jesus Christ that he preached has saved them. If not, then they have believed in vain. Then in verse 14, Paul says that *if* Jesus Christ died and did not rise from the grave, then his preaching (and therefore my preaching) is worthless. And then in verse 17, he says that if Christ did not rise from the dead, then our faith is worthless. And then Paul gives a big, “But” in verse 20. *“But now Christ **has** been raised from the dead.”*

In other words, my preaching and your faith is worthless if Jesus Christ is dead. BUT He lives! And because Jesus Christ lives, our faith is full of great value. Because He lives, He brings us life, and life abundant. Because He lives, when He returns to raise us up to glory, we will be changed, transformed, given new incorruptible bodies that will see no more pain, or sicknesses, or death, or be subject to our sinful passions. Because He lives, our work in the Lord brings the savor of the knowledge of Christ to every place. Because He lives, our toil is not in vain in the Lord.

I want to close with a story. Some of you might be familiar with Christian singer and song-writer Bill Gaither and his wife Gloria.

Bill and Gloria Gaither were trying to be steadfast and immovable, and they saw their music as a work of the Lord. But in the late 1960s, they ran into some difficulties which threatened to discourage them from this very work.

You see, Bill Gaither had gotten sick; his wife had just had a child four months previous and they learned that she was once again pregnant.

Bill's sister was in the middle of a divorce which was a major family crisis and devastated the family. And perhaps to top things off, one of their close friends accused them of using their "work of the Lord" in order to make money. As a result, Bill got very depressed. Maybe he should just give up, he thought.

But, in the midst of these trials, another close friend came to them and prayed over them. And as he prayed, both Bill and Gloria sensed the Holy Spirit come upon them and reassure them. And out of these trials, and the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, they wrote a most wonderful song with these words:

Because he lives

I can face tomorrow

Because he lives

All fear is gone

Because I know

He holds the future

And life is worth the living

Just because he lives

There will be times when you will get discouraged. You will at times be wondering if staying with the faith in obedience is worth it.

There will be times when you wonder if your life of sin was more pleasant than your life of righteousness. You will at times wonder if the good works that you do are worth it, or if you should just give up. But folks, as

Paul says, “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord”. I like this version which says, “*So then brothers and sisters, don’t let anyone move you off the foundation of your faith. Always excel in the work you do for the Lord. You know that the hard work you do for the Lord is not pointless.*” (GWT