

Sermon Title: **“Foundations: Indifference”**

Series: *Learn, Live, Lead*

Speaker: Pastor Damian Mericka

Text: Luke 24:13-35

Introduction



“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” -Acts 13:2-3. In Christ it is never goodbye but *see you later*. Transitions are hard, but at the Spirit’s leading, they can also be fruitful for the Kingdom and Glory of Jesus Christ. This world is not our home, we in Christ are here to take all of Jesus into all the world.

*Together, we **learn** from Jesus, **live** like Jesus, and **lead** to Jesus.*

Foundations is a final series of messages from my heart, as your Pastor, to you and the continuing ministry of Cornerstone

Chapel. May the lamppost shine brighter and stronger for the Glory of Jesus Christ, His Spirit pouring out in greater stride. *And above all, through fasting and prayer, let us be the Body we are purchased, resourced, and called to be- All of Jesus for all the world- **beginning with each of us!***

I. Civic Responsibility (Philippians 1:12-14; 27)

“I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

-Philippians 1:12-14 ESV

Citizenship. For the citizens of Philippi this was a term rich with meaning and value. Once a city residing comfortably in obscurity, this place populated with natural springs would draw the attention of many due to the gold mines close by. Over time, and resulting in heavy plundering of natural resources, this location would be the place of a significant conflict in Rome. It was here the battle of Philippi saw the Republic bow the knee to the new Empire of Rome. From this point forward, Philippi became a Roman colony where many veterans settled. As a colony, they were united by Roman Law, free from Roman taxation, and citizenship was granted to all regardless of social and gender status. Because of this, there was great pride in being a citizen of Philippi.

Paul would build on this sense of identity with them; as they took stock in being Roman citizens, allow this to overflow into their new identity in Christ as citizens of His Kingdom. He would in the same letter write,

“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.” -Philippians 3:20-21

This dualistic sense of citizenship is something that we share today. We celebrate both our identity as Americans and citizenship within the United States of America, as well as our greater identity as God’s children and citizenship within the Kingdom of God. Yet, the challenge also comes with this dual citizenship, namely, which was to take the lead over our lives.

What has happened to me refers to Paul’s two-year imprisonment at Caesarea under the Governor Felix. This is where we left off in our series through Acts a few weeks back. Understand, Paul is writing this letter from prison. Though near the end of this season of confinement, Paul would go on to share how he was able to remain confident in his attitude and effort toward Christ. For Paul, his citizenship in God’s Kingdom took priority over his Roman and Jewish rights which resulted in his confinement.

Served to advance the Gospel means the steady, consistent proclamation and demonstration of faith in Christ that sees the Gospel gain ground. **The language notes not the explosive suddenness, but the steady persistence that brings Kingdom gains.** We miss that truth sometimes. Paul is showing how this imprisonment, while it may have seemed like a win for the enemy, in fact proved to be of great advantage for the Kingdom of Christ! If not for this season of confinement, we would not have significant portions of our New Testament.

Declaring the victory over our circumstances is important, but it is only one side to this Gospel coin. There is another piece that Paul draws our attention to in this letter found a few verses later,

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” -Philippians 1:27

Our ***manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ***, means that we bear the fruit of belonging to Jesus. It is always fascinating to me when some people, after spending time with our kids, say *they can tell they are our daughters!* There is something about being with us, spending time with us, being nurtured in our love and direction that stamps us on them in ways that speak louder than their words. With this phrase, we are reminded that the world should see we belong to Jesus because they see Jesus in actions, hear Jesus in our words, and are touched by Jesus through both our actions and words.

This also speaks to their ***citizenship***. They are to reflect the law of the Kingdom and the heart of the King in which their citizenship resides. To bring even more clarity, in another letter Paul writes this,

“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” -Colossians 1:9-14

That ***I may hear of you standing firm in one spirit, with one mind***, means that we share in this together. Being a part of the Kingdom of God means just that- we are a part of His Kingdom. We have neighbors, brothers and sisters, fellow heirs in Christ. We partner together as citizens to stand alongside, with and for, each other. ***Striving side by side***, means that there is a shared stepping forward. It is praying for, overflowing resources into, and laboring side by side each other that allows Kingdom ground to be gained. *Paul is not talking about the Pastor doing it all while everyone else shouts amen on Sundays- nor is he talking about the steady few who show up on workdays.* This congregation is measured by who is marching in Kingdom cadence for the glory of our King, Jesus! (Share illustration of climbing out of mud in Spartan Race)

These two portions of ***Philippians 1*** act as bookends to an important truth I want to dig deeper into today. On the one hand we ***declare*** the Gospel Advancing through our lives, on the other hand we live in ***demonstration*** of the Gospel Advancing through our lives. What is it that these bookends hold in the middle?

“For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 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.” -Philippians 1:19-21

Paul affirms a partnership in our prayer life and the work of the Holy Spirit bringing Christ's Kingdom into this world. ***What we declare*** and ***how we live*** impacts our prayer life; further it either allows or quenches the Holy Spirit's work in and through us. However, if we are not careful, we can lose sight of this. The citizenship we share in Christ as a part of His Kingdom takes back seat to our citizenship in this world. We can become concerned more with the things of this life that we become ***indifferent*** to the things of God's Kingdom. ***Indifference*** clogs the arteries, causing us to fall back and maybe fall out, neglecting our civic responsibilities.

II. Indifference Addressed (Zechariah 4:1-7)

“And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, “What do you see?” I said, “I see, and behold, a lampstand all

*of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.” And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” Then he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’” **-Zechariah 4:1-7***

Zechariah is a priest and member of the Great Synagogue, established by Nehemiah and presided over by Ezra (both books bearing their names in the Old Testament). This would over time evolve into the corrupt Sanhedrin of Paul’s day overseeing pursuits toward his death. After Israel’s Babylonian Captivity, a decree went out allowing any who desired to return to their ancestral lands. Around 50,000 returned and against significant odds rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. However, they allowed time, persecution, materialistic (a nice goody bag from Babylon) and a sense of disconnect with God to bring a spirit of indifference to the Nation. Fourteen years later after rebuilding their homes, the Temple remained in ruins. They would give to the Temple building fund, but were absent in being the Temple of the living God-ignoring His Word and His people.

They had come so far, and near the moment of Kingdom breakthrough they slowed and stopped. ***Indifference*** is a disease we need to fear more than Covid or any cancer, for it disconnects us from God and each other. This plague continues today, in our churches today, including Cornerstone Chapel. That’s the bad news. The good news, the cure is the same as it was then for us today. God sends them Zechariah to *stir the pot*.

In this vision, God is showing Israel His intention to continue to bring His Kingdom through them into this world, despite their present indifference. ***The angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep.*** This phrase does not mean that Zechariah as physically sleeping, and the angel was his alarm clock! No, this means God snapped His fingers and awoke Zechariah from the zombified state spiritual exhaustion led him into. Despite having God’s anointing and Word, laboring into hard hearts eventually lull’s one to succumb to the same...if not for God! And how does God renew the priest? *More of His presence!*

The vision is of a ***lampstand*** used in the Tabernacle, like a menorah, with a ***bowl*** residing over its seven ***lamp extensions***. This is the promise of a rich supply of oil that would flow into the lampstand keeping the seven individual lamps lit and burning. Yet, what would happen if that bowl dried out? God leaves nothing to chance- nothing to reside and depend on us. Above this bowl, which resides above the seven lamps upon the lampstand, are ***two olive trees***, one on the right and one on the left side. This image, *combined*, shows the limitless supply of oil God would flow into them to burn brightly.

Confused? You're not alone- so was Zechariah! He asked what all of this meant, to which the angel reminded him with or without his understanding, he needed to deliver this message to the Governor Zerubbabel, to flow down in influence over the people he is leading. The physical temple and its furniture represent the spiritual realities in motion beyond what the people can see. However, if they fail to gather and worship in person, they in turn will fail to participate in the advancement of God's Kingdom into this world. All of this was staging Israel, and the world, for Jesus' arrival. When the final stone arrives and fits into its place, the people will cry out ***Grace, grace to it!***

Oh, how this prophecy reaches so much deeper and fuller into the Temple the Messiah will be building- a building made up of living stones in which He Himself is the chief cornerstone! Every saint is a lively stone that comes together, and we labor in this world to see men and women come to place faith in Jesus, sliding into position in God's Holy Temple made by His divine Hands alone! *What stands against us?! What speaks into our spirit of indifference?!*

You don't know what this means? *Then he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain.* Don't these very words sound familiar to our ears today? Is there not a sensation of burning, maybe starting to awaken us as this did Zerubbabel? Jesus Himself declared,

"Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

-Mark 11:22-26

In Zechariah's vision, these two olive branches stem from trees representing the ***Kingly*** line of David and the ***Priestly*** line of Eleazar (descendent of Aaron), both designated to bless into the over all health and bright invitation of the Nation of Israel among the other Nations of the world. These two offices would combine into one Messiah- Jesus who was both King and Priest. Further, it is His Spirit that was poured out upon us, as oil into our lives to richly supply all that we need to both *declare* and *live out* His Truth in us- by faith, the prayers of saints in the power of the Holy Spirit accomplish God's Will in this world!

Pentecost was the release of this divine olive oil to fuel our faith to declare and live out the Gospel in our lives. The Spirit of the Living God is in us, transforming us from the inside out, and reaching through us into the world around us. It is the outpouring of The Holy Spirit that presses against the indifference standing to plague the hearts of God's Children!

III. Why Prayer Matters (Philippians 1:19-21)

"For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 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."

-Philippians 1:19-21

Paul believed that the miraculous gifting of the Spirit continued to bring God's Kingdom into this world, declaring and demonstrating the power and authority found in Jesus' Name! He believed God's will was unfolding with a sovereign partnership with the Spirit led prayers of the saints filled and led of His Spirit!

Why did Pentecost happen? Why do we still need Pentecost today?

If we, as a church look and function differently than what we see in the New Testament we must face two possible reasons:

- 1) God changed.
- 2) The Church changed.

Believing that God does not change, where have we lost our way? How did indifference become the driving force of us as a church? We must look to Israel, the words of Jesus, and then of Paul,

*"And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: 'Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen." **-Acts 28:25-28***

What is this answer? Pentecost. We need the Holy Spirit! Holy Spirit, we need you and more of you!!

*"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit." **-Psalm 51:10-12***

Let us stand, and pray this prayer of Pentecost!

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit."

-Joel 2:28-29