

**"In This Together"**  
**Philippians 1: 21 - 30**  
**Matthew 20: 1- 16**  
**Sunday, September 20, 2020**

When I titled this sermon a few weeks ago, "In this together," I had no idea that there was a Contemporary Christian group out there with a song by the same title. I had never even heard of this group until I happened to google the words "In This Together" to see what may come up. You know, because that is a very familiar phrase. I have often heard it said, "We're in this together."

So, the first thing that popped up was not the origin of the phrase, but rather this group called "Rapture Ruckus," so here are some of the lyrics.

"You are my brother; you are my sister, made by the same God, loved by the same heart. We've got to lift up, we've got to give love. Oh, that's how the world will know us. I'll be the hand that you can hold when you can't make it on your own. I promise you are not alone. We're in this together."

Thinking about that phrase reminds me of one of my favorite re-runs that I would watch after school when I was in Jr High and High School. It was Hogan's Heroes.

Of course, that sit-com was a spin-off from the movie Stalag 13. I finally got to a chance to see the movie when I was only in my twenties. But what was underlying each episode of that comedy and making fun of Nazi Germany was the make-up of the prisoners who were winning the war from a Prison cell deep behind enemy lines inside Germany. They were not only American, but African American, Southern American, British, French, and every now and then, the bumbling German Sergeant Schultz and crazy old Colonel Klink made up a team to help the allied forces win the war. They were in it together.

In Paul's letter to the Philippian Church and also in Matthew's Gospel to the Christian Church, we not only see that "We are in this together," but also we learn just what that means, and just how far that is intended to go. Setting funny shows aside, what we can see, not only during World War II but in any war or conflict in which we have fought side by side with other people either of different races, nationalities, or even faiths against a common enemy, is the sense of brotherhood and sisterhood that transcends race, and creed, or national origin. Paul is writing to the church in Philippi from a prison cell. He truly does not know whether he will be eventually set free, remain in prison for the rest of his life, or be executed.

What he does know is, by the help of the prayers that this faithful church, as well as others, have sent his way, and by the very Spirit of Christ, he has found strength and encouragement and even a sense of faith that he will be delivered. For he sees that because of people like those in Philippi, God still has much for him to do.

Still, he does not know for sure. For him, Living is in Christ; it is in serving God, and proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus; grace, hope, peace, eternal life, even amid turbulence, hatred, death, including the possibility of his own. Living for Christ comes first and foremost. Paul knows that for him, it would be far better to die and be with Christ; but for the sake of the Christian community, he is confident that God will spare him death to allow him to remain at least for the time being to be there for the greater Christian community. Nothing could be more important.

In short, he is telling them that no matter what happens, he is there for them and will do all within his power to support them in their continued struggles to carry on the faith. He simply reminds them to do the same for one another. "Live your life in a manner worthy of the Gospel, so that whether I come and see you or am absent and only hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one Spirit, striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel, and in no way are intimidated by your opponents.

In other words, they are to strive to live together in Christian Community. The opponents are those who seek to destroy such community, not because they are mean. But because God's idea of community where all work together for the good of all is not their idea of community where all work together for the sake of a few. Mainly the leaders.

For Paul and these early Christians, being one in Spirit and standing side by side in the faith had nothing to do with their nationality. It had nothing to do with how they thought about the political structure so long as those in power used that power for the good of others and did right in it.

But if those leaders did not, then Christians should not be afraid to stand up for what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

Jesus addresses the same concern as he tells another parable of what the Kingdom of God is like. Note in advance that what the Kingdom of God really means is the community of God's people so that it is clear that we are not talking about how we will live someday after we have died, but rather how we together are going to live out the vision of being God's people here on earth.

As we hear this parable, we hear and envision a wealthy landowner hiring men and women to come and work in his vineyard for the usual daily wage. Suddenly, if we have not paid attention, we are swept up into thinking very worldly and not heavenly.

That is to say, we are already caught up in thinking about this in terms of economics, a wage equal to work. We may even see in this some sense of a political statement on capitalism only to be surprised that in the end, all of a sudden, it looks like pure communism.

But what Jesus is talking about here is not about politics, and it is not about economics. What it is about is grace. It is about how we see our neighbor. That is, do we see our neighbor as someone we should reach out and put above ourselves, or do we see them as the other side of whatever competitive field we think we are playing on. Someone we should get the upper hand on.

I'll say it again; the daily wage in this story is not money; it is God's grace. And whether we come into it early in our lives, or in our later years, whether we are pastors and leaders in the church or ordinary lay folk, our goal becomes the same. It is to share the same love, the same grace, the same hope, the same approach to living life in Christ that we have been given.

And to do this effectively, to do this successfully, we have to realize that we are in this together. In one Spirit, working side by side. There is no such thing as anybody getting more or less grace than what one needs at the end of the day. We have to see our work in the church as a team effort. While we may have specific roles to play, we must also see our work as a tandem effort, with the glory of it all going to God.

There are churches that are doing great things, not because the preacher is the greatest preacher since Jesus, nor is it because the worship committees create outstanding experiences, or finance committees know how to raise funds and execute spending to the nth degree, or is it because mission teams outdo themselves year after year. The reason they are doing great things is that those churches have come to

realize that they are living in this Kingdom of God together here and now.

And if we are truly following Christ, we will understand that also. We will work harder to be the laborers for the vineyard, going out there to invite into this Kingdom of God, those who are just standing around in the marketplace waiting to see if anyone will notice them.

Will you take notice of them, will you strive to live in the Kingdom of God here and now, filled completely with God's love and grace? Will you realize that you have been filled with what you need to get you through each and every day, and in fact, you have enough to pour over into that someone else's life?

Don't let the sun go down on you being empty and bitter because you felt like you have been cheated. But instead, see the value of living together in the Kingdom of God.

Do not forget our Brothers and Sisters in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, Oregon, and California. So many are in need. And the task is daunting, but when we realize that we are in this together with others responding to God's call to help, to pray, to empower, to encourage, we will help one another overcome. With God's help.