

Thursday, September 10, 2020

SERIES: GROWING AND GOING

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: The True Source of Our Hope and Joy Pt. 1

There is something so powerful about showing grace to people, isn't there? It's a blessing to help people, but it's even more rewarding when we get to help those who can't repay you.

As many of you know, I served as a teaching pastor here in Lincoln, Nebraska. But I also served during that time as a pastor of local outreach. I truly believe that outreach is not a job of a pastor. It's not just a department in a church. Outreach and blessing others is meant to be part of everyone's life. Every ministry of the church is to contain an element of outreach and blessing, so one of the things I was able to create at our church was a movement called #4Lincoln. So often, The Church is known for what it is against, and not what it is for. We wanted to change that. We wanted the people of our city to know that we love them. We wanted to create a community that if our church disappeared tomorrow, the city would say, "Where are they? Something is missing." That's why I created #4Lincoln.

This movement started off with intentionally investing in the lives of people in our spheres of influence: Doing outreach in blessing those who needed a touch from Christ, but of course, all of it was touched with Gospel intentionality. Well, over the course of two years, our blessing and outreach morphed into blessing the city through a Day of Service. We began with blessing organizations, but then it morphed into blessing individuals who we could normally never bless alone, in the ways we could together. What's cool is, over 2 days, we were able to do nearly 50 projects, had almost 700 volunteers, donated over 2000 hours of time, giving away nearly \$30,000 worth of work. We freely gave away what people could never repay. Again, all of it was sprinkled with the Gospel.

When I think back on those events and others we had, it makes me think of the true hope and joy we can experience as Christians. But we'll need to be on guard, because as we'll see in Philippians Chapter 3, there are 5 dangers we'll need to avoid in our Christian walk.

Today we are continuing our series called "Growing and Going". As Christians, we are not supposed to live like spiritual babies, but instead, we are to *grow* in our faith and then *go* and make new disciples. And today we'll learn how to grow in our hope and in our joy.

Here in Philippians 3, Paul is in prison and is writing to the believers in Philippi. And I tell you if Paul can have joy and hope while sitting in a prison cell, you and I can have hope and joy in whatever circumstances we face. So let us pause and listen to the Apostle Paul, beginning in Chapter 3, verse one of Philippians (NASB):

¹ Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

Though he says, “finally,” Paul here is not ending the letter, but simply moving on and continuing to the rest of his letter. He says, “rejoice in the Lord.” This is the theme of Philippians: “be joy-filled.” So therefore, rejoice. Be glad. Why? Because of who God is, and because of what God has done for you. Paul says it’s no problem to share these things again. Like many of us who have good information, or know something that will help a friend out, we are happy to share it again with them. This is what Paul is saying. Then Paul shares why it’s no problem. The NLT puts it this way: “to safeguard your faith.” Another rendering of it might be “for your safety” or “for your protection”. The idea is, “Hey, if you need truth, if you need assurance, if you need to be anchored again, no problem. I’ll do it again and again.”

If I were Paul today, I’d be saying the exact same thing to you, to your children, to your grandchildren, and anyone else who is a believer. Friend, safeguard your faith. What’s going on here? Well, we will unpack that as we move through the text, but what Paul is saying here isn’t unique.

There is a verse in First Peter 3 that you really should memorize: This is First Peter 3:15, but let me read it in context, beginning in verse 14: “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” (Vs. 14-16, ESV)

Peter says you are going to suffer for the name of Christ, but don’t be worried. Instead, recognize Jesus Christ as the Lord, and always be prepared to make a defense to whoever asks you for the reason for your hope or your faith. Yet do so with gentleness. Treat others with respect. “Make a defense” is the Greek word *apologia*. It’s a judicial term, like a lawyer puts forward a case for someone. What Peter is saying is: you have to safeguard your faith, because when the hard times come, and persecution happens, you need to be rooted - you need a firm foundation – you’ve got to have reasons to believe. You better be prepared to declare to yourself, and to others, what you believe and why you believe it.

Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, gave a similar command in Jude verses 3-4, “Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴ For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

Jude is saying, because there are bad people who have come in to distort the Gospel, to distort God’s Word, you need to contend for the faith. The word “contend” here actually means “to continuously agonize”, and in this case, to continuously agonize in defending the truth. The reality is, so many people believe that Christianity is a country club. Some people have even

compared it to a cruise ship. When you read passages like this, you are reminded that no, this is not a cruise ship; No, this is not a country club - it is a battle. It is a spiritual battle, and we will be called to continuously agonize over defending the truth of the Gospel.

DISCUSSION:

N: Let's talk more about this battle with Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. Arnie, you love this battleship analogy. Why is it such a good illustration of living in faith?

A: Because the analogy works so well, because it has all to do with expectations. [Hmm.] You're probably too young to have ever been on a cruise ship. But when you get on a cruise ship, it's like you go to the hog trough, I call it - And there is just buffet. There's dinners - at 11 o'clock at night, there's another dinner. It's just amazing. Okay. And you have expectations, and pretty soon, you know, you expect to be spoiled, and all of that; whereas on a battleship, you're lucky to eat. And if somebody shoots at you, it's like, yeah, of course - it's a daily thing. I mean, that's what you expect. So the problem is, when you're a Christ follower, and you think you're living in faith, and that faith is that God is going to make it super easy. He's going to provide everything. And so you're there, waiting in line at the buffet, and somebody starts shooting at you. It's like, "Oh my goodness, where's God in all of this, and all of that?" Well, sorry - It was never meant to be a cruise.

N: So I'm just curious, from your perspective then - because God is love - would God be on *The Love Boat*?

C: I don't know, but a cruise ship would be my nightmare as an introvert. And I've been on two cruises - Absolutely it's too close quarters for me. And the battleship appeals to me, because I would feel like I had some kind of a purpose on the battleship, right?

A: So I would say yes, Christ would be on the cruise ship, because He's here, working in America, and most Christ followers that we track believe that they're on the cruise ship, not the battleship, up until COVID-19 came, and all of the racial stuff. And now that they're canceling football, I mean, "Get out of the buffet line you guys".

N: Yeah. I think moments like this, remind us that we really are in that battleship. And I think these are moments of great clarification. These are great moments for Christians to really step up and get out there. When life becomes disrupted, it helps us reevaluate, and makes us think about - okay, what really matters? Honestly, football doesn't matter. It's great. I love it. I love watching. I love coaching, but at the end of the day, that's not what really matters. What matters is Jesus Christ glorified, and us getting out there and making disciples. And when we do it, it's going to be hard. So pick up your weapon, the Bible, and "get out there", according to Arnie Cole. Okay. Cara, you know that we need to take the Bible seriously. The Bible describes it as a weapon. It's sharper than any two-edged sword. It's living. It's powerful. But I think that tells us something, about who we're really fighting, and where the real battle is. Talk about that for a moment.

C: Well, the battle is spiritual, and the enemy has been the enemy from Day One. I don't think we need to be reminded who that is - but it's the devil and his schemes, you know - so when you read Ephesians Six, and you say that the struggle is not against flesh and blood, I mean, how

pertinent is this? It's against rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world - against spiritual forces of evil - in Heavenly realms. The Bible - yeah, it's a weapon. So we have to fight with those spiritual weapons. It's not with violence or arguments, okay - It's with truth, righteousness, the Gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and yeah, the Word of God. We are in a spiritual battle for our lives. If nobody is seeing this, I don't know what I can do for you at this point. Just - it's crazy what's going on.

N: It is. And I think even though we have this powerful weapon, God's Word, at our disposal, the reality is - unless you're in it every day, you're not going to be real effective in using it. And that's true in a real battle. If you're given a gun - if you just were handed a gun - and had never had any training on it, I can guarantee you, you're not going to be good at using it. And you're not going to be able to hit your target. Same is true with a sword - you may be able to watch a Jackie Chan movie, and him wielding that sword. If you grab it, you're going to be useless with it. The same is true for the Word of God. We need to get in it daily. And that's exactly what we found with the Power of Four. Arnie, would you talk about the Power of Four, and using that weapon?

A: When we talk about the Power of Four, we're talking about four out of seven days a week, you get in the Word. And you know, it's voluntarily. So if you send your kids to Christian school - if they're being forced to the Bible - that doesn't count. But what we're looking at is, if you can, for yourself, and for your children or grandkids, if you can get them engaged in the Word - that means read, reflect, and respond - four more times a week, their life looks radically different than anyone else's.

N: Yep. And that's why it is so important that we need to be coming back to the Bible, and getting in God's Word. It is a battleship. So let us be prepared to go to where the battle is, and that is in the spiritual realm. So grab that Bible, get trained up, and let's do this together.

So coming back to Philippians Chapter 3, Paul says, "Look, I will keep coming back to you, and encourage you again and again to safeguard your faith; To secure it.; To strengthen it." Why? Look at verse 2 (NASB): **[2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision.](#)**

Here we find danger #1: False teachers: Paul was desiring to protect and safeguard the Philippians from a group of false teachers - he calls them dogs, evil workers - and the false circumcision. Paul is not talking about 3 separate groups of people, but rather 3 descriptors of the same group, namely the Judaizers, or as we might call them, legalists. Judaizers or legalists were those who wanted to combine grace and law. These were people who would say, "You're right, salvation comes through faith by grace, *plus* something you do." When Paul wrote to the Galatians, it was the Judaizers as well that Paul was combatting.

Paul calls these people dogs. Don't you love that? Paul just calls it as he sees it. Jews would refer to Gentiles as dogs. Dogs in their culture were not the cuddlesome lap pets we think of today. They weren't groomed; they weren't fluffy. They were scavengers who roamed from

place to place, barking, nipping, and feeding on the trash in the streets. Paul really gives it to these Judaizers, and says, “They are the dogs now!” Paul then describes these legalists, these Judaizers, as evil workers. Why would he call them that? These works were works of the Law – good acts. But here’s the problem – these works were of the flesh: Detached from the Spirit, so they, in turn, were evil. They were filthy rags, because they were all about the self and self-glorification.

Paul is a masterful combatant, so he finishes the ol’ 1-2 punch with a play on words. He calls them “the false circumcision”. This could be translated as “mutilation” or even “the cutting off”. He is saying they mutilate their bodies, but for what purpose? They do it out of religious ritual, but there is no conformity to their heart! Abraham was saved by faith, *not* by circumcision. What he is recognizing is, that no work of the flesh can save you: Not circumcision, not tithing, and not communion – nothing by man can save. This is why Paul said their circumcision is purely mutilation – it won’t save. Listen to what Paul says as he clarifies in Verse 3: **³ for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,**

Here we find danger #2: Legalism. Paul says Christians are the true circumcision. They experience the cutting away of the hardness of their hearts. They do not rely on the actions of the flesh to save them. Paul says Christians, followers of Christ, are ones who worship and serve in the Spirit. They worship God through praise and service - not in their power, but in the power of God and for the glory of God. They do this not out of obligation, or by means of earning their salvation. They do it out their love of God, empowered by the Spirit. Christians glory - or as we might now say boast - Christians boast - not about what we can do, but because of Christ and what He has done. It’s not about us. It’s all about Him.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB) reiterates this: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”** As Christians, we can put no confidence in our own effort. Man’s effort to receive salvation, or get to Heaven by our own means, is religion. Religion is empty and only promises to fail us. In fact, what does this produce in us? It produces: Fear. Anxiety. Worry. Unrest. In religion, we can never know if we have done enough. We never know if we have fixed every wrong. We never know if we’ve said enough “I’m sorry”s. Religion is hopeless. Religion and works of the flesh are simply joy stealers. So what’s the solution? Paul gives us the solution. He says to rest in God’s grace through Christ Jesus. We’ll see this in the upcoming verses. Verse 4: **⁴ although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:**

The NLT puts it this way: **“though, I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could.”** So Paul, in verse 3, says, “You can’t have trust or confidence in the flesh or in your works.” But in verse 4, he says, “But hey, I know my capacity – if someone could do it, it would be me.” And this is emphasized in the next sentence. He says, “Look, if you think you’re the most religious person – the best of the best as far as works go – I can top it.” Paul then backs it up with a brief, but powerful biography and testimony to make his case. Verses 5 & 6:

⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Paul here gives an impressive resume regarding his worthiness of salvation, if anyone could attain it by their works. He gives them in two categories: The first is of birth and the second is by behavior. He says he was circumcised on the 8th day. This ties back to the Jewish tradition of circumcising newborns on the 8th day. He was a true Israelite. He was no half-blood muggle (for you Harry Potter fans). No, he was a full-blooded Israelite. But that's not enough: He says he was from the tribe of Benjamin. You might remember - Jacob's favorite sons were Benjamin and Joseph. Benjamin and Joseph were born to Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel. Israel's first king came from the tribe of Benjamin: Saul. Even Paul, upon birth, shared his name. He then finishes to say, if you are looking for the pinnacle of being a Hebrew, *it is me*.

N: Let's bring in Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole to talk more about today's study. Cara, describe legalism – what might it look like today? And why do you think it's so easy to fall into?

C: Well, it's a position that is essentially opposed to grace - so rules and regulations that are meant for achieving salvation and spiritual growth. I mean, I think it typically promotes, like an outward appearance, instead of, like an inward change - which would be the relationship piece of living a life with Jesus. So it looks the same to me as it's always looked. I mean, when you look at the Bible, it's avoiding certain things - like tobacco, alcoholic beverages; some people avoid dancing, movies. Some people believe you're more spiritual if you go to church on a certain day, or to avoid eating certain things. They wear magic underwear, Nat, in some circumstances. People will pray to saints instead of Jesus. People actually confess their sins to a man, instead of just talking to Jesus about it, who died for us, so He could be that perfect mediator between us and God.

N: Okay. But legalism is pretty popular - I think if we're really honest about it. And we go from these pendulum swings - we go from, you know, fundamentalism, to this licentiousness, and talking grace, and then people start running crazy - too wild. So then they come back. But legalism is still as popular as ever. Why do people keep coming back to it?

C: Well, I think as humans, when we do something, we expect something in return. So grace is a gift that is nothing owed in return, and that's hard for us to understand, and to wrap our heads around, you know. And as this recipient of God's grace, then we're gracious to others. So we use grace to serve others, and to exercise our spiritual gifts, in building up the church with that. And I believe we can be gracious to others, and not have it be legalism, and we don't have to accept heresy to do it. [Right]. So I think it's just hard for us to wrap our brains around.

A: Well, I don't know. I don't know if I agree that legalism is coming back. I mean, take a look at the trend. I don't know what the high percentage is of young people that live together without marriage. A lot of them attend church. Well, am I being legalistic to think that they're sinning? Now if I throw it at them - I'm not talking about that - but I'm not so sure that legalism is really

coming back, unless you go to some of the most narrow churches. But there would be an argument that actually churches are getting further and further away from any kind of boundaries, wouldn't you say?

C: Well, wouldn't that be where they were supposed to be then, is in church, and God would convict them then not to live together, or to get married?

A: Well that's the whole idea.

C: Right. So legalism would be booting them, or, you know, there's some people who wouldn't marry them, because they've already been living together. I think by doing that though, you would push them into a church that has bad theology, right?

N: I think no matter what, when legalism is properly defined, it is adding any thing, or any human work, to the salvific process. Right? That's what we're really talking about. And that's where we might say, well, people are very liberal in their theology. And so they'll say, "Anything goes, I can keep doing what I want" - that licentiousness, right? That pendulum swing. But I can tell you, once people live over here long enough, who claim to be Christians, there'll be a correction, and chances are, we'll go back to that fundamentalism that says, "Look, don't drink, don't smoke, don't dance. Don't read certain books. Don't go to movies" - that type of thing. So I think we will continue to see this pendulum swing, if we're not careful. But I do think that legalism can be seen in those big pendulum swings, in denominations, and in church movements. But I think if we're honest, even the people who are over here, living together, doing whatever they want, claiming to be Christians - which chances are, we're going to say that they're possibly not - they're still going to have their, "But I still go to church once a month". Well, the question is, "Why?" "Well, I should." "Why should you?" "Well, God expects it." Great. What are you doing? You're adding works. "Well, I may not be living great here, but I went to church. I gave a tithe. I did this and that". So we sneak legalism in, in very subtle ways, without even recognizing it. But we're doing it to cover our butts - even those of us who know better - but I think we see it all the time.

C: Yeah. Church leadership, Arnie - you don't have someone leading a church, and they're living together out of wedlock. You know, I think we have to be real careful. I'm a sinner and I go to church, and, you know, who knows what I've done that week, or whatever? I mean, doesn't that have something to do then, that with sanctification, you have one person in a relationship that comes to know the Lord, and they start going to church regularly, but they're still living together. At some point, you would hope that Jesus would lay on their heart, like maybe we should get married, or I have to leave this person, because they don't want to marry me.

N: Oh, I totally agree. Sanctification is a process. I mean, good night - if I look in my life, I'm thinking, "Man, the things I still struggle with sometimes" - I should be a lot further down the road. So we all are going to struggle with sin. But over time, God convicts us more. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts, and we have those moments of remorse and true repentance and coming back to God. So it will be progressive. Do those moments, those conversions happen -

where they get saved, and like the addictions are gone? Absolutely, I've seen it. And I've seen it enough to know it - that it's a thing, but most of the time it is progressive. And that progression comes by us getting into God's Word - by us being willing to follow and submit to His best plan for our life. But again, that takes time, and it takes some intentionality and submission. So yeah, it will be progressive, but that doesn't mean that the expectations still aren't there from God's perspective.

C: Right, exactly.

A: So I guess I don't agree that the pendulum is swinging the other way to legalism. And I would argue that because Bible literacy is at its lowest that it has ever been and Bible usage is at its lowest that it's ever been, since we've been watching that - How can you be legalistic, if you don't know what the legal system is?

N: Well, I would say, I didn't say we are swinging towards legalism right now. I say that that is the track record in the history of the church - that we swing from one to the other side. I think for sure right now we are in a licentious...

A: Oh, okay.

N: So I wasn't saying that we are right there, right now. I think that we are subtly legalistic in a lot of ways, because we do the lucky rabbit's foot, and we do the "Well, I better go to church at Christmas", [Oh, I see what you're saying] "because I know I should. And in case I do die, I may as well be able to tell God - well, I went to church twice a year". [Okay]. That's what I'm referring to. So I think we are in a licensure.

A: So the rule book isn't the Bible necessarily. [No]. Okay. It's the notion of the Bible: "I go to church, you know, I don't know what the Bible says, but I'm a good guy. You know, I gave that guy." Okay. Okay. Now you're talking. Boy these young pastors [He agrees with me]. You've just got to listen to them, and you listen long enough, and they'll make sense.

C: There's two different things going on here, Arnie. Legalism in that, you know, praying to a saint, or telling your confessions to a man, avoiding certain alcoholic beverages - that's what Nat's talking about. But you're on the other side of it, of, you know, the pendulum swings both ways. It always comes down to leadership. Is there good leadership in your church - that is in the Word of God - that is following that? That is a full on grace. Right?

N: Well, and that's also something that Paul was struggling with. He had these legalists, these Judaizers, but then he's also dealing with false teachers. And I'll be honest, there's a lot false teachers today, worldwide. And so I'm just curious - Arnie, from your perspective, how do you spot a false teacher today?

A: Well, first of all, they're usually young, meaning under 40 or close to 40. [No!] I would say they have a beard. How do you spot one? You know, I've been fooled. I give people the benefit of the doubt. And if you tell me you're a Christ follower, I'm the exact opposite of a legalist. You know, it's like, oh man, it takes a long time to follow a sophisticated false leader. That is, the people that are very good at being a false teacher, or a false leader, have perfected their act. So

it's not just so obvious. So for me, you have to get to know the person, and then you have to get to know their theology. And it just takes a lot of time.

N: And sometimes, it's hypocrisy, and sometimes, it is really bad theology. And as you're saying, it takes time to listen, to hear that theology, to find out what it is that they really are teaching, but also are they consistent with what they are teaching? And if they're false teachers, then that's going to be really bad, with what they're doing and saying, but hypocrites will often say the right thing, but then do something else.

A: But the crazy thing Nat, is - even with false teachers - I had a friend who we were talking about this false teacher, and he goes, well, you're right. But you know, both of my daughters came to know the Lord through that person's teaching. So, you know, it's like, "Well shut my mouth". You know, it was like, how does that happen? But so, even Jesus - the Holy Spirit - can use these monsters for people to come to know the Lord. So praise God for that.