

347 Not ashamed, not terrified

We reflected last week on the role of Christians in a Christian-rejecting society, using the current season of so-called “Gay Pride” marches as a topical example. We noted that Christians being in a minority within a society is far more the norm, down the centuries and across the world, than we in Britain might think, for here we have been blessed for a long time with an official acceptance of Christianity within our constitution and society, from the Crown downwards. So the fact that the Christian Faith is now deemed unwelcome in Britain by numerous opinion-promoters need neither surprise us nor scare us, as we learn from some verses in Philippians Chapter 1.

In Acts 16 we read of how Paul and Silas and their companions crossed over from Troas to the great Roman colony of Philippi, thus bringing the Gospel into Europe for the first time (16.7-12). As usual they faced many struggles and successes, notably their time in prison with that earthquake, their fellow-prisoners all remaining in jail rather than escaping, and the astonished jailer who “sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas” before blurting out, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”! (vv 13-30, KJV). The answer was as ever very simple and very effective (vv 31-34). No wonder then that Paul felt particularly close to “all the saints in Christ Jesus” at Philippi, giving thanks to God for them and praying for them constantly (from Philippians 1.1,3-4).

But Paul is writing this epistle to them from yet another prison, probably in Rome. He explains that although he is largely “out of action” during his time in prison, Christ is still being preached, both within the prison by Paul’s very presence and words (1.12-13), and also outside by others, some of whom are pure in their motives, and some of whom are less so (1.14-18).

Paul writes of his great hope “that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (vv 20-21). What a wonderful example for the saints of Philippi and of today.

We note that Paul is not ashamed of Christ and the Gospel, whatever his circumstances and whatever the nature of the opposition arrayed against him (vv 18-21). He has this great strength, assurance and boldness because he knows from abundant experience, in his own life and in the lives of others around him, that Jesus Christ is true - and that

nothing and no-one, at any time or in any place, can alter that central fact one jot. Alleluia! The wonderful words of Romans 8 chime in exactly with the words here that the Holy Spirit is inspiring Paul to write to these saints in Philippi.

Paul then writes of his inner struggle: he longs “to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better” (v 23), but he needs to stay here – “I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith ...” (vv 24-25).

He urges them to “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (v 27b), and then, just as Paul himself intends to be not ashamed of anything, he writes – “And in nothing (be) terrified by your adversaries” (v 28a).

Nothing to be ashamed of, and nothing to be terrified by! By the mercies of God we are equipped with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is in Himself uniquely the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14.6). But also uniquely, this crucial Christ-message sits upon impeccable foundations of factual, historical events and constant, first-hand experience.

In drawing to a close this time, it is helpful to remember that everyone on this planet is a believer, a believer in something, even if that something is a belief in Nothing At All. As such, when it comes to assessing the likely truth or falsehood of the many beliefs on offer, the playing field is wholly level, or to put it another way, “we are all equal starters”. So, in terms of credibility, which beliefs rest on the strongest foundations? How strong for example are the foundations underlying, say, Atheism, Buddhism, Communism, Evolution, Hinduism, Islam and so on? Er ...! Praise God, the foundations of any such Christ-denying belief systems are 100% threadbare when compared with those underlying the Judeo-Christian Faith, with its impregnable Holy Bible, its central Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and its life-changing news of Jesus’ atoning death and physical resurrection.

It is because of these rock-solid foundations that neither Paul, nor the Philippian saints, nor today’s saints, need be in the least “ashamed or terrified” as we steadily proclaim the crucial, undeniable truth that “Jesus Christ is Lord”.

Yes – “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord!” (Philippians 3.1a & 4,4).