

The Rock: 02-14-2021

Philippians: The letter of Joy

First reading: Acts 9:1-6

Title: I thank God for you

Scripture: Philippians 1:3-11

Theme:

Paul's heart felt prayers for the church are warm, deep and specific. Always teaching and encouraging, Paul uses his situation as an opportunity to build up his friends.

Introduction:

As we continue on in this letter, it's good to know that it has now been some ten years since Paul's team landed in Philippi and made waves in the city as they established the church.

Paul's love and deep concern for those who made up this church comes through in what he writes. We see the genuine pastor's heart as he thanks them for partnering with him in the cause of Christ.

Over the last decade they have grown, having been discipled and dedicated to

one another, they were discipling themselves and the church was growing.

In other words, the work in them, begun by God, was being worked out through their actions, because of the Holy Spirit in them.

It will find complete fulfillment, as it will with us when Jesus returns. All of this is packed in these verses here that we are looking at this morning.

One of the things we need to remember, and it helps us to actually have joy in life and every situation, is to remember that the battle over evil IS won.

Victory in Christ IS already complete because of the cross of Christ. Our goal is to live in the light of that victory, and always understand who the real enemy is.

The Story:

Last week we talked about where our marching orders come from and learning to know what "hills to die on".

That is so important for our growth because if we forget who the real enemy is, we will fight any enemy, and sometimes even ourselves.

Being focused on the great commission and living out the greatest commandment -Love God, Love people, tell them why, will always help us to keep the right perspective.

It will also help us to fight the real enemy, the devil, whom Jesus says comes only to steal, to kill and to destroy. Spending time de-valuing human beings and dividing humanity in such a way that we have a hard time understanding what a human is, say nothing of what it even means to be human.

Jesus has won the battle, like the Philippian church, let's make every effort to focus the right way.

They were supporting Paul spiritually through prayer, physically by sending help to him and people doing the work of ministry in the church, and they were financially making sure he had all he needed. Very practical indeed.

A praying congregation makes for a better pastor, a joy filled pastor, there is no doubt of that. The joy of knowing that the Church started in Philippi was in prayer for him, was an encouraging thing.

"It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me

of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

-Philippians 1:7-8 ESV

From prison, Paul tells them that I hold you in my heart, that together we partake of the grace of God, and that their existence is confirmation that the gospel is doing its work.

Since he had left them all those years ago, they have been taught, they have been disciplined. So much so, that they have not only produced fruit by way of new converts to Christ, but have taught that next generation about what it means and looks like to be a follower of Jesus.

That alone brings joy to Paul and makes the beatings he suffered and prison time he served worth it all, and it shows in his letter.

Pastoral care ministry has its ups and downs. It is a calling, to be sure, and a difficult one. It can be made harder or easier by those whom we seek to serve.

Prayer, discipleship, unity, works of ministry here in the church, are all essential. Mutual encouragement, more often than not, carries us through.

Paul had, over the course of his ministry, people who came and went for various reasons. Folks who fell short, as we learned last week with Mark.

Others whose names are given to us as a reminder that the race is hard and a long one. Paul mentions some in his letters to Timothy, now a pastor in his own right in Ephesus:

"You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes."

-2 Timothy 1:15 ESV

As Paul charges Timothy to stay the course and fulfill the duties of his ministry he says:

"...holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."

-1 Timothy 1:19-20 ESV

But for all these types of people, Paul had so many more who were like Prisca, Aquila and Onesiphorus. People who were dear to him and prayed for him, supporting and encouraging him even in the worst of times.

"Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus."

-2 Timothy 4:19 ESV

Paul's thankfulness and his joy here is not because he is somehow being nostalgic about the good old days. No, these folks he was writing to were active agents in the ministry:

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."

-Philippians 1:3-5 ESV

Unlike the ones he wrote to Timothy about; here in Philippi, Paul didn't have that issue. Swindoll reflects on this in all seriousness after almost 60 years in pastoral ministry:

"...participants in the gospel from this day until now". Their commitment to Christ and the proclamation of His word never let up, not for a moment. I wonder how many pastors could say that about the churches where they have served. Or how many saints could say that it about longtime Christian friends? Like most of us, Paul experienced some great disappointments, from churches and from individual brothers and sisters in

Christ. But not from the Philippians. The thought of them didn't make his stomach church; rather, it prompted him to thankfulness, joy, and prayer."

-Swindoll's Living insights: Pg. 19

Whether a pastor engaged in full-time ministry or a member of the body of Christ, we all experience bad and hurt and rejection. We are again, mere men and women working out our salvation.

But for all that, how much good, how much faithfulness and support have you and I received? How much help, prayer support and encouragement?

I am sure they had their bad eggs, the takers who just simply complained or did not join in the help of ministry and building one another up. Every church has that, and it is not right, as that's an indicator of a lack of growth. Sorry, it simply is.

But Paul is encouraged by all of the things they are doing right and he is strengthened actually, as a pastor by their obedience to be doing what Christ has called them too.

He is showing his personal side, revealing his tender pastor's heart here. For all of his own mistakes, the one with

Barnabas and Mark especially, we see that Paul too is growing.

A human being, broken and yet called to the gospel ministry, is working out his own salvation -right now from a prison cell in Rome. That is being made exponentially easier because of praying and giving people.

How I yearn for you. This is no: "Gee, I miss you folks, try and stop by for coffee soon." No, it is an intense feeling and longing for. To be filled with compassion and warm feeling for.

It pained Paul not to be able to see them and share his love for them. So much so that he compares it to the affections of Jesus:

"...how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

-Philippians 1:8b ESV

How powerful is that? The affections of Jesus. What He would do, what didn't He do for us in order to make the way for us to come back home to God the Father?

Even deeper still is the Father's love for us. Paul in another letter paints that picture so beautifully for us.

Romans 8:32:

"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

-Romans 8:32 ESV

He spared not His own son. You see, it helps a great deal to understand this grace God has given to us in Christ. Especially given that Paul is joyfully in prison for the sake of the Gospel AND for their sake.

It is clear that neither he nor Silas saw being beaten all those years ago and being thrown in prison as a bad thing. Bizarre as it sounds, the fruit born out of that sacrifice is this body of believers now supporting him.

It's really amazing that God takes this man, of all people, and transforms him in one encounter on the Damascus road, and yet, it is taking a life-time for Paul to work that salvation out.

This is a guy who Luke tells us in Acts 9:

"But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the

Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

-Acts 9:1-2 ESV

Every fiber of his being breathed out hate against Christians, and yet, God found him and used Him for His glory.

Paul, knowing this deep truth, how bad he really was, and that God came looking for him anyway; because of that Paul was driven to die to himself, put all that behind him (as we will see in a few weeks) and live for Jesus.

How are we doing in getting that deep understanding of God's grace upon us? The more we get our hands around that, the more we ought to understand how little we actually deserve it, and the more grateful we ought to be to have it.

That should drive us to want to DO and to BE for Christ, and for others. In very practical terms this looks like helping with sound, and video on a Sunday morning. That serves this body in a way that glorifies Christ. Is that something you can do? We need you.

It's as simple as saying good morning at the door, as helping in nursery, kids church, youth, or seating people as they arrive. All are very necessary and needed at the moment.

I am challenging you as we continue to re-open and re-launch into the future, the very practical outworking of Christ working in you is serving others. Please let us know and we will get you in touch with the right people.

Faithful commitment to this body and the cause of Christ brings the joy and strength we all need to succeed in this race.

The hearts of the Philippian people for Paul, and his yearning for them comes from a genuine Christian community loving not only their pastor, but each other.

Knowing ourselves and being honest about this drives us toward grace for others, and to prayer that God would work in and for them.

This is no guilt trip. This is genuine Christian living. God works in us and for others, guess how? Through us!

The heart of compassion for the lost and genuine love for one another here in this community grows as we not only work out our own salvation, but serve and disciple one another.

We start by carrying one another's burdens, first in prayer and then by asking how can I help serve?

You see, Paul doesn't feel alone in prison, because he isn't, and he is thankful for that. His yearning for his people, drives him, as it should every pastor to teach and to build up:

"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

-Philippians 1:9-11 ESV

I want your love to grow even more. Why? Because they will know you are Christians by your love for one another, Jesus said! But remember, it's not just about "the feels".

IE: God is love and that's all that matters. You know, so long as I love it's all good. No, not really. Here we have to be careful. Yes, love is supreme, but it does not stand alone. Paul makes that clear.

We are to love with...with what? Knowledge and discernment. In other words, not only is there a right way to live with and for one another, there is a right way to think also.

Know who Jesus is and what He has done for you. Discern what is actually right, as you work that out. Don't live like you used to, don't act like you used to before Jesus found you.

Again, we skip ahead to chapter three Paul gives us some clarity:

"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—"

-Philippians 3:8-9 ESV

Attitudes, life-styles, ways of defining your worth by the standards of this world and the culture have to go! It's about who Jesus made you to be and how you honor Him with those gifts, talents and yes, even dying to yourself and desires that do not line up with the Scriptures.

Love is supreme, yes! But love is directed as it were and contained by the riverbanks of knowledge and discernment.

That means there is a Biblically appropriate way in which to live it out. To be clear, that also means that there is a biblically inappropriate way as well. Feelings, while good and essential, do not determine the Scriptural truths.

No, those are known -the veritas of Scripture, immutable, unchanging within any culture. Love teaches us how to live them out in a way that makes the Gospel attractive.

This is why we have the next verses:

"...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

-Philippians 3:10-11 ESV

It is through the Holy Spirit that we, yes, we may approve what is excellent. Working out our salvation never happens on its own, nor does it occur in a vacuum.

It is personal prayer, Bible study, keeping yourself not only in community, but actively working in that community, discipleship for both yourself as well as your brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Christian life is never accidental, it is and has to be very intentional. As with anything in life, hard work and dedication as well as choosing priorities -we grow in love through knowledge and discernment.

We find too, that within that the Holy Spirit does the conforming work of making us pure and blameless.

God took a murderer, whose sole purpose in life was to destroy the Church and get rid of all believers. He knocked him off of his high horse, quite literally, and in conforming him to Jesus, gave him a tender heart, pure and blameless in God's sight.

Willing to be imprisoned for the Gospel and yet yearning for a people who have loved him, served him and were praying for him.

Active in the cause of Christ, the day-to-day necessary things which build up the body and conform us to Christ.

That is a goal to have, and the right fruit to reproduce. Honestly, if you are not serving here as yet in some capacity, pray. I am not asking you to do everything, but each of us can do something.

And God has each of us here for a purpose. Just as He did with Paul and the entire church at Philippi.