

Philippians 1:3-11

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Preacher: Arthur Jackson

- [0 : 00] Good morning. Let's pray together. Father, we give thanks for the gift of this day. From your heart to us, we bless and we honor you for it. Thank you for the gathering of your people here.
- And we pray, Lord, that you would be glorified through the preaching of the word, even as you have been glorified in our praises. We commend ourselves to that end and pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.
- I begin today's message with an excerpt from a letter. A letter that was written from a jail by a preacher.
- Here we go. Never before have I written so long a letter. I'm afraid it's been much too long to take your precious time, the preacher writes.
- I can assure you that it would have been much shorter if I'd been writing from a comfortable desk. But what else can one do when he is alone in a narrow jail other than to write long letters, think long thoughts, and pray long prayers?
- [1 : 27] If I've said anything in this letter that overstates the truth and indicates an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I had said anything that understates the truth and indicates my having a patience that allows me to settle for anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me.
- I hope this letter finds you.
- In some not too distant future, the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.
- An excerpt from the letter from Birmingham jail. And in it, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. challenged an appeal to the clergy of his day.
- To partner, to partner, to get in the game, to partner with him in the cause of equality and justice in the South and throughout our nation.
- [3 : 03] And it was in the spirit of the 8th century biblical prophets. He called them to take a stand for what was right, even if it cost them.
- Dr. King was not the first one to write a significant letter from a jail. As a matter of fact, we have one before us today.
- And like Ephesians and Colossians and Philemon, Philippians can be called a letter from a Roman jail.
- And while the Birmingham letter was an appeal by Dr. King, particularly for clergy to participate in the cause of justice, getting people in the game was not Paul's problem there.
- He had people. He had partners and he thanked God for them. Those who were partnering with him in the gospel.
- [4 : 06] Verses 3-8. Personal praises in view of spiritual partnership. Verses 9-11.
- Pastoral prayers for their spiritual progress. Praises in view of their spiritual partnership. Pastoral prayers for their spiritual progress.

Oh, you're praying with me this morning. Personal prayers in view of spiritual partnership. Did you notice just after the greeting how Paul gives a, you might even say, a shout out of thanks to God.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you. The formal greeting of the letter is over.

And here we find Paul at prayer. And guess what? The prayer room is a prison cell.

[5 : 22] And he's at prayer. Though he is at prayer. And we see that, don't we? In verse 4. Always in every prayer of mine. Making all for you all.

Making my prayer. There it is with joy. And you see it again in verse 9, don't we? And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more.

Paul. He's at prayer in a prison cell. But first of all, he does not get to the petitions. That will come later.

What we initially hear from Paul in the confines of his prison prayer closet is thanksgiving. He lifts his heart and voice in praise to the living God.

And I know for some of you, prison and praise are a little bit incompatible. Now, on the one hand, prison and pouting may go together. But you say, Pastor J, prison and praise?

[6 : 28] It's hard for me to sort of make that connection. Because, you know, prison means confinement. And sometimes it means chains.

And it's being somewhere where I really don't want to be. And where my space is cramped. And I find myself where I really don't want to be.

Is that really a time for praise to God? Ask the apostle. He would say, yeah. I'm in prison. But I still have the praise of God on my list.

Now, this wasn't the first time that Paul had faced these kinds of circumstances. Matter of fact, when he first set his feet on Philippian soil, it was not long before he found himself in the Philippian jail, if you will.

And listen to what happened in Acts chapter 16, verse 25. About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and praising, singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening.

[7 : 36] Praise and prison can be compatible. And I don't know what your prison may look like this morning. It may not be one with bars.

It may not be a physical kind of prison. But do you find yourself cramped in some kind of space where you really don't want to be? You find yourself in a situation in life that really is not really what you would have ordered for yourself.

Let me tell you this morning that prayer and prison and praise, there's a way that they can go together. And can I urge you today to just dial 105.7, the prayer station?

I don't know if that's really it, but it helps this morning, huh? To help you with praise to God in the midst of your confined spaces.

Can you hear Paul? Can you hear him with this very personal praise? I thank my God.

[8 : 45] Is that what he says? I thank God, but notice what he's doing in all of my remembrance of you, huh?

Now, Paul, this is not the first time that he begins letters like this. If you look to look at Romans chapter 1, verse 8, or Philemon, verses 4 and 5. As a matter of fact, this is what he wrote in Philemon.

I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers. Because I hear of your love and faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus Christ and all the saints.

Oh, and when somebody's heart is disposed toward the Lord Jesus Christ and toward his people, if you are oriented toward your Savior who has paid the price for your sins, and if your orientation is toward those whom he has redeemed, Lord, I thank you for that.

When your people are so disposed, that's a cause for thanksgiving toward you. Because, you know, there are other things that we can think about. But if you're thanking God, if you're in praise mode this morning, pastoral, if we thank God for you, huh?

[10 : 04] Now, thinking of some people can be rather painful, can't it? Painful because people often are the cause of pain to us.

And it really hurts us and aches us and gripes us when we think about those who have caused us pain. And we try to avoid thinking of them because it conjures up the pain.

It replays the hurt. But that was not the situation that we see here, huh? There was a sense in which the people in Philippi were a cause of joy and praise and thanksgiving to God for the apostle, huh?

When he remembered those in Philippi who had been set apart by God for the gospel and for good, guess what? He thanked God for those.

Did you notice that his prayers were seasoned with joy? Is that not what we see in verse 4?

[11 : 18] Every prayer of mine for all of you making my prayer with joy, huh? There was something about Paul's Philippian experience that had left a good taste in his mouth, huh?

It had brought a smile to his face when he thought about them, huh? Perhaps it was the entire experience. When he set his feet on European soil there in Macedonia and he saw how God had forbade him to go in two different directions and then he opened the door.

There was somebody over there. There was the man in Macedonia that said, Come over here. Come over here. And then he saw how God had worked things out, huh?

It was a God thing. And when there is a God thing that happens, it brings you joy. Have you ever been led by God and you saw his handprints or fingerprints over everything that had transpired?

It may have been leading you to a certain place or a certain time or a certain person or a certain church or a certain kind of gospel initiative.

[12 : 38] And it had the very stamp of God and the approval of God on it. Doesn't it bring joy to your face? I remember as I look at my brother Keith here on this morning.

As we moved into Woodlawn eight years ago, one of my desires was to do what Jesus would do if he lived in Woodlawn.

And so we finally made my way to the nursing home. And we're ministering there and Jerry was there initially.

And after a while, Keith showed up. Everybody knows Keith, don't they? Hey, just listen up. You'll know Keith if you've been around a while. But as we look at that, that was a God thing.

And God has a way of leading and opening up doors. And some of you, I think of the various initiatives that God has led our founding pastors to start in the approval of the session.

[13 : 40] As we think of a ministry that helps people with expository preaching and as we think of a Chicago Center for Church Planning, as we think of Hope for Chicago, as we think of Neapolis, huh?

God's fingerprints, God's hand, God's initiative, God's leading. And when we think of these things, how many preachers are being reached now, Dave, and been preaching?

Over 800 this past year or so. As we think of the church plant in Africa, it brings us joy to think about what God does.

And of course, joy is one of the significant words of the book, is it not? 16 times in either its noun or verb forms, it is used. What is joy? It's a God-given internal disposition of pleasure and delight and satisfaction.

It's one of the fruits of the evidences of the Holy Spirit. And it's not based on external circumstances. It's based on eternal realities. Huh?

[14 : 46] Based on the living God and who he is and what he's done and how he works within the human heart in ways that bring soul satisfaction, joy unspeakable, and full of glory, huh?

Then, as we're looking forward and see, there's another word here. You see that? Huh? Always and every prayer, making prayer with you because of, with joy. And look at verse 5, because we see another Philippian word that is very important.

You see it there? Because of your partnership. Huh? Six times. And it's cognate. The base word is used six different times.

And then in the gospel, another significant word there. Huh? Fellowship or partnership. Huh?

What does it mean? It's a participation, as it's noted. It's a joint sharing that is more than a casual acquaintance. Huh? It's meaningful sharing.

[15 : 55] It's partaking of something with someone. I remember when we were children. Some of you, perhaps you did this. We committed ourselves to being blood brothers.

Huh? Little small drops of blood with, with the prick of a thorn or something. And then we would sort of press that together. And when you were blood brothers or sisters with someone, meant that you had your posse or that your main man, thick or thin, huh?

It made a special statement of brotherhood that you were bound together in a special way. Huh? And what Paul shared with the Philippian believers was a participation, a fellowship, if you will, in the gospel.

They had been united to the God of heaven through the blood of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, through his gospel. And together, they shared in the very life of God in Christ.

And with Paul, they were now united in advancing the gospel together. There was indeed a rich spiritual union that had expressions in tangible kind of ways.

[17 : 15] They were gospel associates, huh? Each had a stake in Christ, huh? And what this meant, that they shared in his mission in the world, the spreading of the gospel, the fellowship of the cross, a fellowship that was formed by the Spirit of God through the gospel of God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, Paul was not appealing to the Philippians to be his partners, huh? In the cause of the gospel, he was praising God because they were his partners.

And they had been so for a long time had they not noticed the text. From the first day until now, turn over to chapter 4 and look at verse 15.

Chapter 4, huh? Interesting. Let's begin at verse 14, huh? It was kind of you to share my trouble.

Now, isn't that interesting? They're not fair weather friends, huh? This is deep, huh? This is the kind of participation and life sharing that goes with you through the thick and the thin, huh?

[18 : 32] Ah, yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. They had not bolted on him. And you Philippians know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership, there it is, with me in giving and receiving, but you only.

They'd been in it, huh? They were not Johnnies come lately. They'd been in it for about 10 years or so then, huh? And they were in community.

Though separated by 800 miles. In community and what? On mission. Together in that day, huh? Why Paul's phrases?

He praised the Lord because he had some partners. He had some partners in the grandest of all initiatives. He was confined to a prison, but he was not alone.

Paul had people and he praised God for them. Much of last week was spent in Jacksonville.

[19 : 37] Dave and TJ and Ashanti from downtown, we were chopping it up with the brothers down in Jacksonville, Florida. Dave did a lot of heavy lifting that he's enjoying.

I mean, he's got on his bow ties. The work is done and he can enjoy this morning. But the brother was working this past week, huh? But all of us enjoyed the Cutting It Street conference, huh?

H.B. Charles. 42-year-old African-American pastor. Capable. Bible expositor. Exceptionally dynamic preacher.

One of his books is simply called On Preaching. And in it, he gives some reflections and ponderings about preaching. I'm not going to go into that, but I do want to read for you who he dedicates his book to.

This is what he writes. I joyfully dedicate this book to the beloved members of the Mount Sinai Baptist Church of Los Angeles.

[20 : 44] You introduced me to the Lord Jesus Christ. I preached my first sermon to you as an, listen to this, an 11-year-old boy.

Check this out. Listen to this. At the age of 17, just while a senior in high school, you called me to be your pastor. How'd you like to have a 17-year-old pastor?

Who's the 17-year-olds in the house? Come on and take the podium, huh? Yeah? And, check this out, you faithfully and eagerly listen to me preach and teach the Word of God to you for 18 years.

Do the math from 17 to 35 pastoring the church. Enjoying some good preaching and enduring a lot of bad preaching.

You continually encouraged and supported me. Most of the principles are right about in this book I learned while serving you. I practiced them on you.

[21 : 49] I am what I am because of the investment you made in me. And look at this. This is what he gives a scripture. I thank my God for 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.

Now, HB is in the second church. And guess who was in the audience? People from Shiloh, I mean from Mount Sinai in the LA area.

A group of them came in support of him. And don't talk about Shiloh. A hundred and fifty volunteers during the week with their t-shirts on their bodies and their smiles on their faces partnering in the gospel serving those who had come.

They were partners in the gospel. Look at verse six, if you would, please. Look at Paul's confidence. I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 14] What was the good work? Was it the gospel partnership? Perhaps, but more than likely it was something more deep and something more fundamental than exactly what they were doing.

it was the very work of God in their hearts. While certainly a gospel partnership with Paul had begun earlier, what seems to be in view is something that had been initiated by God and it was a good work.

I asked you this morning, have you has a good work that God started in you? Huh? Has something happened on the inside of you that has turned or shifted your orientation toward life?

Has it shifted the very fundamentally the way that you think and the way that you behave? Huh? And I know that many if not most of those of us who are here can testify huh?

Their rich full long term participation in the gospel was an evidence of something that had happened in their lives huh? This was evident so their gospel participation was evidence of a deeper reality spiritual regeneration the good work that it started in them where the word of God had been planted in the soul and up comes the very life of God and all that goes along with it faith and everything that flows out of being regenerated born from above good work planted in the soil of their souls had that not happened to Lydia in Acts 16 which says the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul and she showed the evidence that something had happened it was a good work in the soul of Lydia and others who were there we see three two one by name and two others and then there were more and more and more

[25 : 32] God had begun a good work in them the good work of salvation and the good work of sanctification it's one that continues through the ministries of the word and the spirit and of the saints and such is the Christian life as we march to a day mentioned up here as the day of Jesus Christ that looks at our Lord's return it looks at the end of the age the Old Testament speaks about the day of the Lord and often when we think about that we think about it particularly for the nations it was a day of reckoning but for the people of God as we often it's often a reference to what's going to happen for God's people at the end of the age it is a day of reward as a matter of fact Paul put it this way I'm ready now being offered up poured out as a drink offering the time of my departure has come

I fought a good fight I finished the course I kept the faith henceforth there's later for me a crown of righteousness here it is which the Lord the righteous judge will award me on that day reference to the same day and not only to me but also those who have loved his appearing the good work of salvation what are we talking about Paul's personal praises because of their spiritual participation and it continues look at verse 7 it's right for me to feel this way about you because I hold you in my heart for you are all here's another koinonia where partakers with me with with me of grace God's favor and two different dimensions in my imprisonment while I'm imprisonment but also while I am on trial both in the defense and the confirmation of the gospel confidence visible tokens that they had been given

Paul had a sense that this church was with him in his imprisonment and in the defense the Philippian people were dear to him he carried them in his heart yearned after them sharing the affections of Christ for them Paul is a human channel for what the Lord Jesus felt for the saints at Philippi you see that verse eight I yearn for you all with the inward affection again it speaks about I love this New Testament word the Beverly hillbillies would call it the innards again but again the viscera if you will it's an internal sense of affections and again speaking about the internal life and yearnings as we say with the affection there it is of the

Lord Jesus Christ that's the word personal phrases in view of spiritual partnership but let's go quickly to pastoral petition petitions for their spiritual progress pastoral petitions for their spiritual progress notice there in verse nine it is my prayer that your love may and I love this New Testament word abound overflow more and more with knowledge and all discernment the bottom line here friends is that Paul is praying for the spiritual progress for their spiritual growth for their spiritual maturity and if you want to go if you want to grow in the Lord spiritually we need the things here that

Paul is praying for you see what's he praying for that your love may abound more and more probably what's in view here is multi-dimensional love that overflows for God and the saints and even for the laws but given the content of the book love for one another probably is primary I mean he's going to go ahead and address them and there may not have been a big blowout but there were some issues that were going on in the Philippian church their love would overflow more and more and what a great starting point isn't it love for praying for God's people in regard to this crown if you will of Christian virtues that's what love is by this all men know that you're my disciples that you have what love for one another and is not love the first of the fruit of the spirit that are mentioned through the spirit is love joy peace so forth and so foundational to the mature

[30 : 54] Christian huh we see that don't we in first Corinthians where Paul highlights that they are immature and they're acting like children and then in the last chapter of first Corinthians chapter 16 I believe verses 13 or 14 he calls them to love huh he calls them to love huh and he reinforces it act like men be strong let all that you do be done in love foundational to the mature Christian life failures in your Christian life and mine can be traced back to a lack of love a failure to nurture and to exercise love that looks out for the best interests of others but a breakdown in love can lead to a breakdown in other places huh yeah the greatest of these is love but love is the starting part but it's sort of like a step on a stairway love travels with other companions

Christian maturity also demands that we have spiritual knowledge huh that you are spiritually in the know I mean it's just not some fuzzy kind of feeling there are some things that some spiritual knowledge that you need huh you need to know about the truths of our faith we need a deep insight or discernment Paul prays that love would overflow but also that spiritual knowledge and discernment would travel with love huh what's the goal he wants their spiritual progress maturity in the Christian life huh God honoring living being able as we see there to pass the test so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless and there it is again for the day of Christ huh this petition that we see here is not unlike the prayers that Paul prays in other places

Ephesians 1 great prayer huh Colossians 1 great prayer huh in a similar vein Ephesians 3 for this reason I bow my knees before the father from whom every family in heaven and earth is named that according to his the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner man that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith that you being rooted and grounded here it is in love may have strength to comprehend there it is with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge to be filled with all the fullness of God is praying for the spiritual progress the spiritual maturity huh evidence of maturity it shows up in your walk in my walk doesn't it it shows up in our decision making good decisions are reflected in how we live how we behave huh the day of the

Lord's turn was to will be the inspection and reward time the time of testing to see how we have responded to the various means of God's grace to include his word his spirit and his people when I was a kid the huckster used to come to town from time to time huh he would make his way through the neighborhood and on his wagon would be a load of watermelons huh and if you know anything about watermelons and I'm not a watermelon lover huh because it truly has its name huh water it's a lot of water and watermelon huh any watermelon won't do huh my mother would test the watermelon in two different ways first of all there was the thump test huh because a good watermelon has a good sound to it huh and the second of course was the taste test huh those who stand the test will be rewarded those who fail will suffer not the loss of salvation according to

Paul but the loss of reward Paul's prayer is that at Christ appearing the Philippian believers would be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Christ huh did not our Lord say that the father is glorified when we bear much fruit picture the tree with me that is is bending with ripe fruit under the load of ripe fruit oh don't you want to be that kind of believer that's bearing ripe fruit to the glory of God huh father is glorified huh through that yeah it's a picture of what we see here spiritual transformation and progress the new has replaced the old the rotten fruit of ungodliness has been replaced with the ripe plump fruit of godliness the works of the flesh have been replaced with the fruit of the spirit the father is glorified huh personal praise in view of spiritual partnership pastoral petitions for spiritual progress huh if you're in Christ you participate in the fellowship of the redeemed a spiritual partnership we're joined to Jesus and we're joined to one another ours is a fellowship of the spirit and we participate together in the advancing of the kingdom through our prayers and sharing also our spiritual and tangible gifts we share with one another we invest in one another and challenge one another and hold one another accountable as those who are partnering together for the cause of the gospel but as we participate we have our eyes on a day of accountability when Christ returns and with that in mind undergirded by prayer we make spiritual progress in this world huh isn't that what we want as the people of God we want to participate having received from God redemption through his son we want then to participate in the work of the gospel in this world and we can do so together for the glory and honor of

[37 : 57] God I'd be remiss if I closed this message this morning without saying how much of joy it is to be in community and on mission with you who call Holy Trinity Church your home brothers and sisters we are bound together in Christ and together we want to see the city of Chicago transformed by the power of the gospel we praise God for your partnership but also we pray for your spiritual progress praising God that we're in this together and we're seeking to touch the city by touching our neighborhoods and I praise God for our Kenwood Corps who on behalf of our church in hands on ways ministered to one of their community in a time of need we praise

God for your partnership in the gospel in the city on the south side in High Park in Kenwood and in Woodlawn spiritual partnership but we're praying we're not satisfied there has to be spiritual progress we want you to bow in love to grow in spiritual knowledge even as you give yourselves to academic and professional pursuits spiritual knowledge we want you to know God and believe me if you know God you will function as God wants you in whatever sphere you find yourself in may you may each and every one of us be fruit bearing people and may we never lose sight of the day of the Lord may we be confident that he who has begun a good work in each of us in and through the person of

Christ will perform it keep on keeping on isn't that one of the sort of the implications or applications of what we're seeing here keep on keeping on stay in the spiritual partnership participate participate with your prayers participate in tangible ways participate in your giving participate in the spiritual partnership but move forward in your spiritual progress and we're praying for that those who are participants in the gospel have all that's needed for life and godliness and maturity until he comes the growth of the gospel by way of spiritual partnership growth in the gospel through spiritual progress that's what we get from this passage from Paul's prayer in prison may we embrace it for his glory Lord we thank you for this text today thank you for all that we have in Jesus thank you for our partnership in the gospel that we're in it together for your glory in this city for the advance of your kingdom and may we be spiritual may we have spiritual progress in our own personal growth as we do so together in Christ's name amen