

# Philippians Introduction

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Date: 29 May 2016

[0:00] Amen. Grace, you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

! Amen. So here we are in what we, according to the church here, call ordinary time.

That sounds dreadfully boring, doesn't it? Now we just celebrated Pentecost, where we celebrated the coming of the Spirit. Before that, we celebrated the ascension of Jesus. Before that, we celebrated His resurrection.

And now, we're in ordinary time. So it seemed like a little bit of a letdown after all of those high points. Now the reality is that it shouldn't be.

Even though we don't have the focused themes that we do during other parts of the church year, during ordinary time, we are about the business of ordinary Christians doing ordinary things.

[1:11] Which is always extraordinary. If we're doing what we're supposed to be doing, making disciples, growing in grace, that's the business we're about.

And it's okay that that's ordinary. It should be. And of course, we're in green, which is my favorite color, so I'm happy about that. Now I saw a meme for ordinary time on Facebook a while back, and it said, you ready for this?

The church was going green before it was cool. Cool. Guess you had to be there. Now, because we're not bound to the major themes that we are in other portions of the church year, ordinary time really frees me up as a preacher.

I have the opportunity to do things like sermon series, which is what I'm planning to do starting today in the weeks ahead. Now, we'll be doing a series through the entire epistle to the Philippians. Now, that kind of approach to preaching is at least somewhat unusual for Anglicans, I think, although it's becoming more common. So I want to start with a few words about why we would do something like that.

[2:32] Ordinarily, I preach from the lectionary, and the lectionary is a good thing. It has the benefit of getting us through pretty large chunks of Scripture, so it's a useful tool.

But it does tend to chop up the teaching of individual books of Scripture. And because of that, I think that it's important that if we're given the opportunity, we go through whole books.

We get to go more deeply into the books of the Bible that way, and ultimately more deeply into the message of Scripture. I think that we are a congregation that loves and cherishes and is committed to the Bible as the Word of God, and want to see us go more fully into what is already a strength for us.

Which brings us to Philippians. What is Paul's epistle to the Philippians all about?

Now, obviously, it was written by St. Paul to the church at Philippi. As we see in the book of Acts, this is a church that Paul had founded during his missionary endeavors, a church that he had a really deep love and affection for.

[3:43] Now, scholars believe that he wrote this letter, and the evidence from the letter itself seems to support this, during his imprisonment in Rome.

And we think probably that Paul's imprisonment in Rome ultimately led to his martyrdom for his commitment to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. Keeping that in mind helps us to form a solid understanding of the background of the letter.

So what is it about? Well, Philippians is a joyful letter and a joyful book. Paul has in view the deep unity, love, and affection that believers have for one another in Jesus Christ.

And Paul is celebrating the deep love that he has for the church at Philippi, and the love that the church has for him. He is celebrating their partnership in the gospel.

Now, look at that in contrast with the epistle to the Galatians, which the lectionary will have us going through in the next few weeks, where the primary tone goes something like, what are you doing, you stupid foolish knuckleheads?

[5:00] The joy that we find in Philippians is absolutely inspiring when we stop to consider that Paul is writing from prison. But even that can't stop the joy that he has in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And that reminds us that the hope of the gospel is something that the cares and concerns of this life, something that even the best efforts of the enemies of the gospel, that is a hope that cannot be taken.

So, unsurprisingly, the hope of the gospel is a major theme in Philippians also. It's about the hope that we have in Christ, and it's about how we live out in daily life the hope that we have in Christ. It's an extremely practical book, so I think it will have a lot to teach us about our own lives in Christ. Now, why this book for Church of the Holy Trinity at this time?

Why Philippians? Well, I think that we are a congregation that is grounded in the gospel, that treasures the gospel, and our call is to go even more deeply into the gospel and live it out more and more fully as a congregation.

[6:22] We are a congregation that does have a lot of love grounded in the truth. So I think that Philippians is a good book for us.

So let's jump in. Philippians chapter 1. I'll be preaching from Philippians 1, verses 1-11 this morning. So please look there with me. Verse 1, we see our opening greeting. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons. Paul and Timothy, in Christian unity with one another, are writing to the church at Philippi to the saints, to the people of God, with the bishops and the deacons of the church together. Written from partners in ministry to partners in ministry. And already we see the theme of our unity in Christ at work. And what we see in verse 2 as sort of the conclusion to the greeting is found in other epistles from Paul.

[7:31] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, there is actually a lot of content in this short greeting.

First of all, notice that Paul groups God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ together. And then consider that the title Lord for Jesus is also important.

Now, in the Greek Old Testament, the word that's translated Lord here is used for the God of Israel. The same Greek word used for the Lord Jesus here. What Paul is getting at is that Jesus and the Father are one and that Jesus is God.

Add in Paul's teaching on the Holy Spirit, which we will encounter elsewhere. We see Paul affirming from the very beginning of his letter both the divinity of Jesus, that Jesus is God.

[8:41] Paul is also affirming the Trinity. That provides the framework for understanding the rest of the greeting and, in fact, the rest of Philippians.

The grace and peace that the Philippian church has, that all believers have, is from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and through Christ's saving work.

Grace and peace. We are justified, clear to the guilt of our sin, through faith in the precious blood of Jesus, shed for sinners like ourselves. We are sanctified, set apart, made holy through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

And we have peace with God through the sacrificial, atoning death of Jesus Christ. And we have unity with one another in our common hope.

Now, Paul immediately goes on to express his thanksgiving for this common hope and the common calling that he shares with the believers in Philippi. Looking at verse 3, 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.

[10:03] Now, Paul is writing as a pastor here. And as a pastor, what he has to say here is so touching and so inspiring to me because what Paul writes here of the church at Philippi, I could say of Holy Trinity, which is part of why Philippians jumped out at me when I was first planning a sermon series.

I thank God in all my remembrance of you because of our partnership in the gospel. Now, a little exercise.

This might be the only time you were ever given the okay from me to look around while I'm preaching. So make the best of it. Look to the person on your left.

Look to the person on your right. Okay, look in front of you. Now, look behind you. Alright, look around the nave.

Now, what Paul said about the church at Philippi, is that how you feel about every person you see? Yes? If the answer is no, please don't answer.

[11:32] Out loud. Talk with me about it later. We'll see what we can do. But remember, the kind of unity that Paul is talking about here is essential to living into what God intends for us as individual believers and as a congregation.

if you see someone that you cannot say that about, you need to start working on that today. Frankly, if we're not at work by the grace of God to come to that kind of unity, we are not being faithful to God.

We're not going to grow spiritually in the way that God intends for us. Now, having expressed his love for the Philippian church, Paul shares his certain hope for them.

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. Now, the hope that Paul expresses here is really important.

Remember, Paul is writing to the entire body of believers in Philippi. They certainly must have been a diverse group. They must have had their problems, their sins, their shortcomings.

[12:55] Almost certainly, not all of them were super Christians. But Paul is certain that God will bring to completion what he started in them.

Why? Because God is mighty to save. We are saved from the beginning to the end by the grace of God and we have a God who finishes what he starts.

I am reminded here when I think about this of what Paul wrote in Romans 8 verses 28 through 30. We know that for those who love God all things work together for good.

for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the firstborn of many brothers.

And those whom he predestined he also called and those whom he called he also justified and those whom he justified he also glorified. Paul evidently sees this faithfulness of God his goodness his providence at work in the lives of the Philippian believers.

[14:17] God had predestined them to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. God had called them through the Holy Spirit to faith in Christ. God had justified them through the blood of Jesus.

Jesus had lived the perfect life they could not live and they died on the cross for their sins in their place and they had received forgiveness of sin through faith in Christ.

God was sanctifying them having sent the Holy Spirit into their hearts to make their unclean hearts clean.

And God would certainly glorify them finishing what he started would bring them to eternal life free from sin free from guilt free from death from beginning to end God was at work in the lives of the Philippian believers just as he is in our own lives.

And he is a God who finishes what he starts. That is why Paul could be so confident that God would bring it to completion in the lives of the believers in Philippi.

[15:30] And it's why we can be so confident that God will bring to completion what he started in us. And that is good news.

Because it's so easy to get discouraged isn't it? How many of you have sinned in the past week? Let's take it even a step further.

How many of you in the past week have sinned in a way that you've sinned many many times before? Repeated a sin that has plagued you before and continues to plague you.

Does that happen to you? Is that frustrating? It's easy to get discouraged. But Paul gives a strong ground for assurance here.

For encouragement. God has started the good work. And he will bring it to completion. Now in this life we will all continue to stumble to slip and fall sometimes sometimes to fail.

[16:39] And by the grace of God what will we do? We'll keep coming to the foot of the cross in repentance and faith trusting that God will finish what he started in us.

So let's draw near to Jesus the crucified one. So that is how Paul feels about the Philippian believers. What he hopes for them.

What his confidence for them is. He goes on back in Philippians 1 in verse 7. 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.

Again, we see a restatement of the grounds for Paul's love for the Philippians which is their common hope in the gospel. We need to remember brothers and sisters especially in the world that we live in that there is no greater bond we can have with other people than the bond that we share with our brothers and sisters in the gospel.

[18:06] We got to stick together. In the west in countries like ours we live in a post Christian culture where most people simply don't understand our faith. They think we're weird or fanatical maybe.

If they're more aggressive they hold us openly in contempt. And in other parts of the world our brothers and sisters are being actively persecuted for their faith. So looking back to our exercise from earlier we need to make sure that we are in a right relationship with every person in this room every person in this congregation we need to cultivate fellowship with other believers in this place in our city in our diocese ultimately around the world.

Why? Because we live for the same hope the same purpose and we have the same goal. And on top of that we're going to be stuck with each other forever.

So we may as well get used to it now. Paul loves the Philippian believers with the affection of Jesus Christ.

The deep affection of Jesus Christ. And we need to love one another in the same way. Now Paul goes on to talk a bit more about his hope for them and his love for them and his confidence that God will bring to completion what he started in them.

[19:40] 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. The glory and praise of God. Now notice in verse 9 Paul includes love knowledge and discernment together.

The kind of love that Paul is talking about is love that is grounded in truth. A selfless supernatural kind of love that only comes to us through faith in Christ.

This is the kind of love that we can't produce on our own steam. But only through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, which must mean that Paul is hoping that the Philippians will be filled more and more with the power of the Spirit.

that's what I hope for us too. And he hopes that they will be pure and blameless when Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead.

[21:06] Looking back at what Paul has already said, it's clear that he has every expectation that this hope will be fulfilled. The Philippian believers have already had their sins forgiven freely through Christ's atoning death.

They're being cleansed of sin by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit and one day that work will be complete. They will be completely cleansed of sin and will enjoy the gift of eternal life.

Will be glorified all because of what God in Christ has done. And he hopes that they will be filled with the fruit of the Spirit that comes through Jesus Christ.

And what does that description in Galatians 5 where it's contrasted with the works of the flesh.

And that starts in verse 19. Now the works of the flesh are evident. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

[22:23] I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Now what Paul wants for the believers in Philippi is for them not to walk according to the ways of the flesh.

Now as believers, this is the kind of stuff that God has saved us from. what we've repented of, and we are not to return to doing what we used to do.

We belong to the kingdom of God. And this kind of behavior is at odds with our new citizenship. And especially for those who aren't believers, there is a stark warning here.

Persisting in this stuff will keep you out of the kingdom of God. Apart from repentance and faith in Christ, sin will lead us to eternal destruction.

But the good news is that God's mercy in Christ is absolute and unfathomable. No sinner who repents, places his or her faith in Jesus Christ will be turned away by the incredible mercy of God in Jesus.

[23:45] not only will we not be turned away when we repent and trust in Jesus, we will be filled with the Holy Spirit who changes our unclean hearts from the inside out.

Begins changing us from what we used to be to what we will be. And that hope in the power of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, in our lives, changing us is what Paul hopes and expects to see in the lives of the Philippian believers.

And what does that look like? The fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. Looking at Galatians again. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Against such things there is no law. To be clear, that fruit is not something we can produce in our own power.

It comes only through the grace of the Holy Spirit. But how do we grow in that grace? Well, we grow in grace through what we call the means of grace.

[25:08] So what are those? Well, it includes things like the preaching and teaching of the gospel, spending time in the scriptures, the word of God, participating in the sacraments, drawing near to God in prayer.

Now, that's not meant to be a complete and exhaustive list, but that's a good start. If we are not spending time with Jesus in these ways, we are not going to grow in the fruit of the Spirit.

And if you notice, most of these things are things that we can't do by ourselves, things that we can't do if we're worshipping at St.

Mattress of the Springs on Sunday mornings. Some of them we can do on our own. We should and must have a personal prayer life and do personal Bible reading, but we also need each other, to grow into the full stature of what God intends for his people.

Which brings us back to unity, our love for one another, our common hope in the gospel, our common commitment to the truth and knowledge of the gospel.

[26:25] Brothers and sisters, as we have seen in Philippians this morning, we need each other, and we need to encourage one another, to grow in the love that abounds more and more with knowledge and discernment, that we may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, so that we may be God's holy people together.

Brothers and sisters, this morning I say with Paul that I am sure that he who began a good work in our lives will bring it to completion. And I'm also convinced that he who began a good work in our life together, as a congregation, as Church of the Holy Trinity, will bring that to completion too.

So I'll close with a question. Are we in this thing together? Are we together? in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.