

# Surprised by Joy

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, thanks for having me here tonight. Ness said to say hello. Yeah, a number of you I haven't met before, but we were parishioners here for a number of years and Ness said to say hello.

The kids still miss coming here, so do we. Samuel this morning wanted to know, now which church are we going to? I think he's missing Jenny Smith and the Grace here, but we're slowly settling into St Paul's Warragul and that's been really encouraging.

And we thank God for your support and prayers and we praise God for that. But as I start tonight, I wonder if, I mean we all have met those alarmingly joyful people.

You know what I'm talking about. They're sort of too happy to be healthy. There must be something wrong with them. They're just too joyful. Life can't be that good. You know, you're sort of talking to them one day and they say, you know Andy, I was walking onto uni today and I saw this ant crawling up a branch.

It just made me rejoice. I think, how do you muster up this joy? It's an ant. I mean, it's just too good to be, secretly I'm jealous. I'm not cynical, I'm jealous of these people. But then you go to the next level and you get lots of shiny, happy people holding hands.

[ 1 : 10 ] You gather lots of these joyful people together in one place. That's actually one thing I used to love about the rock festivals of the late 60s. Not that I ever went to them. I wasn't born, obviously.

I hope that's obvious. But the film versions, at least. This is what I found really exciting. Monterey, Woodstock, Isle of Wight. You watch these films and you see hundreds of thousands of shiny, happy people.

Everyone's smiling. Everything's sunny. Life is beautiful. People are coming together. The tribes are assembling. They're grooving to the music. So you've got Canned Heats Festival Anthem. I'm going up the country where the water tastes like wine.

You can jump in the water and stay drunk all the time. Yeah, man. I mean, it sounds fantastic, doesn't it? Right on, brother. That was the mythology. That was the mythology of my late teens, actually.

I spurned the 80s and I dug back into the 60s. It felt legitimate. It felt real to me. And I still love the music that came out of that time. But the reality, of course, was that that joy was like a thin layer of icing on a rather murky cake made up of, well, obviously, drugs is the obvious one, so-called free love.

[ 2 : 19 ] That is people being used up and discarded, usually women, actually, in fighting. Actually, the Isle of Wight concert, Joni Mitchell has to stop midway through one of her sort of folky ballads to tell people to stop fighting in the second row because that's my seat.

What are you talking about? In fighting, people getting ripped off, people making lots of money. Some people still are. Then there was Altamont, one of the last festivals on that scale where the Rolling Stones employed the Hells Angels as their bouncers and a person was actually beaten to death in the second row while the Stones kept playing and had to be rushed out very quickly afterwards.

It only took four years and the late 60s shiny, happy people movement imploded. We open up the book of Philippians and it's like hearing a letter from an alarmingly joyful person.

That's what this letter is. It's so full of joy. Paul is just gushing over this church who already share and Paul wants to continue sharing in his joy and you read it and you think, is it too good to be true? How can this guy be so excited about a church? And it's even more alarming when you realise that Paul's not writing from a rock festival somewhere in the first century. He's not writing under the

influence of an illicit substance.

[ 3 : 42 ] He's writing from a Roman prison and he knows that he may not get out of it alive and yet he's so full of joy as he writes to these people.

Paul's joy is a little bit like rock festival joy in that it's about people coming together. It's about shared joy. These people are partners in something they feel is bigger than themselves but which catches them up in it.

But it's bigger than a shared love of music or a shared generation with its common angst, its common hopes. It's bigger than some pipe dream of uniting the world as one.

It's men, women and children, different ages, different nationalities, being brought together so that their lives revolve now not around a place, not around a band or an idea or a dream or even a project in the first instance, but their lives now revolve around a person, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's joy, our joy as God's people is born of the knowledge that we have all things in Christ and that the whole goal, the whole purpose of our life together and of where this world is headed is for his glory.

[ 4 : 59 ] All for Jesus. Now I wonder, is Paul's starting to sound like an annoyingly joyful person to you? Well, I hope that by the end of this talk you will be pleasantly surprised by joy and that you'll even share in this joy if you don't already.

Let's read it again. You might want to have your Bibles open to Philippians 1. I've been a bit naughty. I have a slightly different translation. You can sort of pick the differences and we can compare them afterwards, but here we go.

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Bit of background here. In the years 49 to 52 AD on his second missionary journey, Paul with Silas and Luke and Timothy go to northern Greece to this prominent city of Philippi, a really important city.

If you were a citizen of Philippi, you were automatically a citizen of Rome with all of its rights and privileges. That was a big deal. We read in Acts 16 that Lydia and her family were the first Christian converts and when Paul and these guys leave Philippi, they leave a small but faithful church.

[ 6 : 13 ] In fact, right away, they take Paul on as a link missionary. So next stop in North Greece is Thessalonica and already, Paul says, they sent him gifts there. They were supporting him there in his mission.

Ten years later, Paul's in prison in Rome and he writes this letter, Philippians, in lieu of being there in person and he has two chief goals in writing this letter. The first is this.

He wants this church in Philippi to stand firm for the gospel of Jesus, to persevere in their faith and mission. Second aim is this. He wants them to be united in Christian love as they carry out that mission.

To sum it up, a couple of slogans. He wants them to see that they are all one in Christ Jesus and he wants them to be all for Christ Jesus. I think you can hear that even in Paul's opening greeting, which is sort of the same sort of greeting he has all the time.

who are Paul and Timothy? Servants, that is literally slaves of Christ. See, they practice what they preach, they're slaves of Christ, all for Jesus. Who are they writing to? Well, the Philippians, obviously.

[ 7 : 22 ] He singles out their leadership, overseers and deacons. There's going to be some particular encouragement for them in the letter, but all of them he describes as saints in Christ Jesus.

Why is that? Is that because they were some sort of super spiritual group who got to be called saints? Did they get a sort of a special authorization from the Pope or something? No.

This is Paul's way, you'll know, of describing all Christians in all his letters. If you're a Christian here tonight, you are a saint. A saint is just someone who has been set apart by God, for God, through Christ.

Saints in Christ Jesus means that, like the Philippians, we are united to Christ in his death and resurrection. Our sin is dealt within him and we're alive to God now forever in him.

God's grace, God's peace are ours now because God the Father sent his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die and be raised again for us.

[ 8 : 23 ] But Paul really gets into the guts of his letter by thanking God for these people. And it's not just God bless the Philippians, is it? He's gushing over them. Have another listen. 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.

And 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. 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 defence and confirmation of the gospel.

For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. Wow. Paul Barker, that is, is overseas at the moment.

He's teaching around the world, one of his teaching tours. Imagine he sent back a letter like this and Wayne stands up next Sunday morning or whoever and reads this out.

in all my remembrance of you, always praying with joy. I mean, it would be a bit embarrassing maybe, a bit over the top, a bit gushy. Paul rejoices at God's work in the Philippians.

[ 9 : 38 ] What's the big deal? Verse 5, he says, your partnership or fellowship in the gospel. Now, I was a bit confused growing up, growing up in an Anglican church in Ivanhoe, just down the road, trying to work out when I was growing up what fellowship was and the closest I could come up with was that it was drinking a cup of tea and on a good day having a biscuit with that cup of tea because after the service, the minister would say, and now for our time of fellowship together and it was always adults standing around drinking tea.

So maybe that's what Paul's excited about. He's remembering those services at Lydia's place and, you know, nice sermon, Paul and pass the scotch finger biscuit. I mean, they're a great biscuit. You break it in half and when they don't break, it's a wonderful, but surely it can't be that excited that's what he's talking about.

Fellowship, the cup of tea and the biscuit after the service. Well, it's something a bit bigger than that. Partnership's getting closer, isn't it? It's the koinonia word and it speaks of a self-sacrificing conformity to a shared vision.

That's what he's talking about. A self-sacrificing conformity to a shared vision and that shared vision, Paul says here, is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Partnership in the gospel. Now, what did that actually mean in practice for Paul and this church? Well, it meant that when he was in prison, they sent food and gifts.

[ 11 : 04 ] If you're in prison in the ancient world and friends and family didn't give you food, you didn't get fed, you relied on that, they provided that support. It actually meant they sent one of their own number, Epaphroditus, we read about later, to go and actually help Paul and see if there's anything that he could do for him.

He stayed with him for a long period of time. We already know it meant supporting him financially in his mission work. Actually, Paul will talk about that at length in chapter 4 of this letter so that the gospel could be taken to other countries around the Mediterranean as well.

It meant sharing in that mission themselves as a church, taking the gospel out. It certainly meant praying for Paul as we'll see in a moment. And it also meant sharing in the sufferings of Christ with Paul.

Not distancing themselves from their apostles, a bit embarrassing, might get tarred with the same brush, you don't want to end up in prison, no, but being prepared to suffer with Christ as they share in that partnership.

And of course, it would have meant sharing a cup of tea when they were there together. I hope that's the case tonight. I'm looking forward to it actually, that part of partnership. And I should say actually that I honestly want to thank God for your partnership in the gospel tonight.

[ 12 : 16 ] That's what's happening. That's the same with every link missionary here. It's not sort of they're doing it all and you're sort of this separate functionary or something like that. No, no, no. It's genuine partnership in the gospel.

That's what's going on here, a genuine sharing in this mission together. And I thank God for the partnership that we share with Holy Trinity and have for a number of years now.

And it's exciting, isn't it? Because the very existence of this church, of every church and the fellowship, the partnership we share in Christ and with each other is clear evidence, isn't it? That a miracle has occurred. God's done something. Paul says, verse 6, What is this good work of God?

Making and keeping and growing them as Christians. Their hearts have been captured by Christ's love for them.

[13:18] And that's a love which spills over and is expressed in the costly active family love of God's people, that partnership in the gospel, the church, and it spills out again into an active love for a lost world as they pour their resources and their energies and their prayers and their time into seeing this gospel taken out to people who desperately need to hear it.

One of the things people first notice about Christians is the love and the purpose they share. They seem to know what they're doing. They seem to always have something planned.

Where does that come from? How do you explain it? God's grace. See, Paul doesn't start this letter by patting them on the back, does he? Well done, Philippians. You're such great guys.

You've mustered up the strength. You've done it. Fine achievement. No. He starts by thanking God for them. Rejoicing before God for them. This deep love, this gospel partnership that Paul and his church share is a work of God's grace.

Christ is at work in his people. It's his love that they share together. Verse 7, It is right for me to feel about this way, about you all, because I hold you in my heart or you hold me in your heart.

[14:37] Same thing's going on in this passage. For you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

So let's be honest and think about what it is that binds us together as people here at Holy Trinity Doncaster and with the missionaries that are sent out from here. What is it really?

Is it a shared love for a building or for music or is it a shared history that we have, family or otherwise? Is it because of cultural similarities? Is it a special aid project that we share and is that primarily why we meet together?

Now, these are great reasons to meet together with other believers. Don't get me wrong. But if we really are God's people, the church, what binds us together, who we share in is Christ.

And what we share in is his mission, making him known, his gospel known in the world. God has gathered us together in his son and for his son.

[15:48] We are all one in Christ Jesus and all for Christ Jesus. That's why the church exists now and will exist for eternity.

Well, the Philippians are going great guns, aren't they? This is a really encouraging church. But it's clear that God hasn't finished with these guys. They're a work in progress.

That's why Paul's still praying for them ten years later, which is an amazing commitment in itself. It's a long-term commitment. But of course, like every church until Christ returns, this church is a work in progress.

They needed to grow in the love they have for Christ and his people. They needed to grow in their knowledge and service of him in the world, knowing that one day they would stand before their Lord as their judge.

And so this is Paul's prayer for them. Verse 9, Paul's prayer is full of grace, isn't it?

[17:04] He's asking God to enable them to live out the way of life that Jesus died to enable them to live. A life which alone can glorify God, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

I don't know about you, but when I read these prayers of Paul here in other letters, I always find it a humbling experience, a bit embarrassing really. I sort of compare it with my own prayers. He's just sort of, dear God, please help me to have a good week.

Dear God, please help me to, I don't know, pass this exam, whatever it is. I remember Zoe, who works with us on campus, describing her ministry at Christian Union once as getting people ready for Judgment Day, getting people ready for the return of Christ.

It's a long-term goal, but it provides a great focus for your prayers. It's Paul's focus here, isn't it? I know it doesn't feel like it, but the horizon of your life is not graduation day, getting into uni day, getting a job day, wedding day, kids' birthday, house buying day, retirement day.

It's the day of Christ. It's the day of his return. And it's that day more than any other which must order our lives and shape our prayers.

[ 18 : 28 ] The great goal of our lives now, whatever their specific shape will be, married, unmarried, working, studying, whatever, is to please him and to live for his glory alone.

Now, Paul will flesh out more how that prayer could be answered in their lives. He'll exhort them to live this way later in the letter, but first what he does is share his testimony. He shows them what it looks like in his life.

And there's some, I don't know if Sue Colley is still coming up with great ideas for evangelism here, but here are a few ideas. We've got imprisonment and potential martyrdom as great gospel opportunities.

I suggested this to some of our faculty groups as sort of, as they were planning evangelism. So let's hear about Paul's evangelism and how these things factor in.

Verse 12, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel so that it's become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

[ 19 : 31 ] And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed.

And in that, I rejoice. Here he is, joyful Paul again. I wonder if the Philippians were surprised.

They've been keen to find out how Paul's going.

They've sent one of their number there. They've finally heard back from him. They want to know, how's he going? How's he faring in prison? They want to know that. They also want to know how the mission's going. This is a committed church. Is it a waste of time?

Should we stop sending money? Should we stop praying? Is this imprisonment a full stop? And wouldn't you be expecting, wouldn't you understand if Paul was just a tad frustrated, angry, or defeated in his words?

[ 20 : 36 ] Where does his joy come from? Well, two key phrases I think help us. Verse 13, he says, my imprisonment is for Christ. See, Paul knows why he's in prison.

It's not because of the might of Rome that it's winning out over Christ. It's only a matter of time before this tiny Jewish cult, this Jesus movement is finally crushed under its feet.

No. Paul knows that he is in prison because he belongs to Christ and because he's serving Christ's mission. And that mission, that gospel is unstoppable.

It's amazing. See, his imprisonment hasn't stopped God's plans. Paul's chains have served the spread of the gospel. How? Well, he tells us. The Roman guards, see, they think they've got Paul locked up, but they're just his captive audience.

He's just locked up. He gets to preach to them all day. They have to hang around and listen to him preaching. That's what he says. The whole imperial guards found out about why I'm in prison for Christ's sake.

[ 21 : 35 ] Other Christians in Rome who aren't in prison, they're emboldened by Paul. They seize faith, perseverance, and they take the word out fearlessly, he says. So it's having that effect. And of course, the Philippians receiving this letter written to them are also learning why Paul's in chains and they too are being emboldened.

It's so different to the way I at least think of my life or the way I guess see you. We think about our life together on campus.

You know, we're living out our life together. We've had all of these meetings and made all of these plans and all these amazing things on campus and we're praying hard and all's well. It's all good if we can get on with it unhindered and when we're strong and when we're healthy and no one gets sick and when the plans aren't interrupted and when we get all the room bookings and all that kind of stuff but what happens when they are interrupted?

What do we do then when the plan doesn't sort of come off? Disappointment, frustration, anger, fear? We need to remember, don't we, that we're not living in this world.

CU doesn't exist on campus for CU's sake. Holy Trinity doesn't exist in Doncaster for Holy Trinity's sake. We exist here for Christ's sake, don't we? And nothing is wasted with him and his plans cannot be interrupted.

[ 22 : 56 ] They cannot be stopped through our struggles, our apparent failures, our awkward, dorky conversations. The gospel is being spread.

Paul says, my imprisonment is for Christ. That's what Paul remembers. That's what he tells people around him. That's what he tells these prison guards. Guys, the reason I'm here is for Christ's sake. I wonder, does that, I mean, I know it's a church and it's got the cross on the top. It's more visible than CU on campus. We're more like guerrilla warfare jumping out of the bushes of people. It's a bit different. We don't have a building.

And I know that people exist here. It's sort of the churchy thing but does Doncaster know that Holy Trinity exists at these buildings and people have been meeting here for 150 years for Christ's sake as we heard at the start of the service.

Do your friends, do your family know that that's why you turn up to church everywhere? Not just because it's always what you've done or it's the particular tradition of the branch of your family but you do that. You meet with God's people for Christ's sake.

[ 23 : 56 ] That's why you exist. That's why you're here. Do they know that? Well Paul says and here's the other key phrase in verse 18 that all that matters is that Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.

See it turns out that some of the brothers and sisters in Rome have been emboldened to spread the word aren't all doing it with the same motives. Some are with Paul. They know why he's in prison. They love Paul. They know he's there for the defense of the gospel but others he says are doing it out of rivalry. Maybe they see Paul as a bit of a try hard apostle. He's in jail. I mean come on. What's going on here? That's weakness. Maybe they've been harboring some professional jealousy and here's their chance to get one up on Paul. We'll show him who the real evangelists are. Whatever. They're trying to afflict Paul he says. Trying to frustrate him. And what does he say? How dare they? Don't they know who I am? I'm the apostle to the Gentiles.

[ 24 : 57 ] Don't they know how hard I've worked all these years? The persecutions. I've poured out my blood, sweat and tears. I've been shipwrecked. I've been flogged. Don't they know? It's just not fair. I've got to get the word out. I've got to expose these people.

I've got to tell everyone how horrible they are and defend my honor. No. Doesn't say that. He says the word about Christ is getting out. And that's what matters.

Paul doesn't rejoice in his own reputation. He rejoices in Christ. If Christ is being proclaimed, if his lordship is being announced, if people are being called to turn back to him in repentance and faith, that's all that matters.

Again, how often do we get this the wrong way around? I'm up when people praise me. I'm down when they don't. So much of what we do in our lives and perhaps together is based on other people's opinions of us.

What will people think of us? What will they think of us? Our reputation. But our joy, like Paul's, derives from submitting to Christ by being united to him, from serving his gospel, all one in Christ Jesus and all for Jesus.

[ 26 : 11 ] And do you hear the irony here? See, these guys preaching to annoy Paul, to get on his nerves, we'll show him who the real dudes are, they're actually causing Paul to rejoice.

Paul can rejoice in chains. He can even rejoice when fellow workers denigrate him. Why? Because he knows Christ, that his life and acceptance before God are found in him and because he lives for Christ alone.

Verse 13, my imprisonment is for Christ. Verse 18, all that matters is that Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice. Okay, so joyful Paul rejoices in the prison, in the present rather, in prison.

Now he says, I will rejoice, whether I live or die, I will rejoice in the future. Why is that? Verse 19, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death, for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Well, here's more evidence of this koinonia, this partnership in action. He says, the Philippians are praying for him and what do you pray for a servant of Christ who's in prison? What do we pray? We

pray for deliverance, of course, don't we?

[ 27 : 41 ] That is an excellent thing to pray for Christians in prison, an obvious and good prayer and Paul knows that that's one wonderful way that God could answer that prayer, that he'd be freed and he could get on with this work of spreading the gospel but he also knows that that prayer could be answered through his death, his martyrdom.

You see, the word translated as deliverance in verse 9 is the same word Paul uses everywhere for salvation, the salvation that we have in Christ. In other words, Paul is confident here no matter what charge his earthly persecutors bring against him, even if they should take his life, that he will be vindicated and saved through Christ.

He will not be ashamed in an ultimate sense. See, Paul knows that he's been caught up into the life, into the purposes of the Lord Jesus.

His confidence is in him in both life and death and so the whole purpose of Paul's life is that Christ be honoured through him.

And we have this amazing motto of Paul's, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Now I wonder if you've ever had one of those secret thoughts that goes similar to this and I hope I don't die or Jesus returns before I get to get married and have sex or travel overseas or get to go to a Bob Dylan concert again.

[ 29 : 10 ] Not necessarily in that order but we all have these fantasies. You know what I'm talking about. But it says a lot about how well our life fits this motto, doesn't it? To live is Christ, to die is gain.

Really? Is that true? Is that true of me? Paul's torn, isn't he, between life and death as well but it's not because he's dreaming the great Australian dream and he's vainly hoping against hope that death won't come before he gets to tick everything off the box.

No, he knows death is the great enemy to every godless dream. Every life that's centred around our own desires is frustrated, is interrupted by death. But death holds no final terror for the Christian.

When we die we go to be with Christ. We are safe and secure with him forever. That's what he's talking about in verse 25. To depart, i.e. die and be with Christ. That's my desire.

It's far better. So here's his tension. God's purpose may be that he lives on for a while. Why? To finally get the PhD done, to get the quarter acre, to write the great novel, to experience a fulfilling career, the partner for life, grandchildren gathered around the Scrabble and the Jason Recliner, this kind of thing.

[ 30 : 22 ] Why might God give him, give us more years to live? Why? So that Christ be honoured in our lives and people served through our lives.

To live is Christ. To die is gain. That's why I arrived here safely tonight from Druin and didn't die in a car accident. That's why you've come safely to the second half of 2008.

That's why God's brought you here. Did you know that? For Christ's sake. That's why we go on living. And it's in that hope that we die.

Verse 22, If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which shall I choose? I can't tell. I'm hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ. That's far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again.

[ 31 : 28 ] Paul's been grabbed by Jesus' love, hasn't he? And that love Paul's had in his desire to love and serve others. Paul understands the reason why I might be granted freedom is not to sort of sit out my days on a deck chair somewhere but to continue serving God's people with the gospel of Jesus to see them grow in their faith, come to faith, grow in faith, live out their life and mission in the world, enjoy Christ, marvel in the knowledge of his love for them, see their lives, their families, the way they work, the way they live transformed by that love.

Paul's great goal in life is to see the gospel progress as people become Christians and progress in their faith with the ultimate goal of Jesus Christ being glorified in his ministry and in and through his people.

Paul and the Philipians are all one in Christ Jesus and all for Jesus and this wasn't just a people movement in one sort of little corner of the Roman Empire in the first century.

2,000 years later, Holy Trinity Doncaster, we're reading this letter, Christians in China are reading this letter, we're reading it this week in public meetings on campus, Christians in Aboriginal communities are reading it in the Northern Territory, Christians in Africa are reading it. We know, don't we, that although now we're separated by place and time in some circumstances, we are all one in Christ Jesus. That's what Paul rejoices about.

[ 33 : 01 ] It's why he writes this letter. God wanted that church in Northern Greece in the 60s AD. He wants us to know in 2008 AD the true source of lasting joy that tends to his glory.

To know that what we share as God's people is stronger than Paul's imprisonment, stronger than secular or Islamic or communist or materialistic opposition to the gospel today, stronger than any setbacks in our plans, any trivial issue that might divide us, stronger than the so-called new atheist movement we face on campus, stronger even than our own sin and death and hell itself because if we are in Christ, part of God's family, God has caught us up into his plan to glorify his son in the church and in the world and that plan is one that he has determined to use us, his people, to carry out our prayers, our plans, our words, our money, our mistakes, our sufferings.

Nothing is wasted with him. So I want us to pray that this year and throughout our whole lives we all come to share more and more in this joy, the joy of being loved by and loving and serving the Lord Jesus Christ in our great gospel partnership together to the glory of his name.

Let me pray to that end. Father God, we thank you for this letter which is so full of joy that it's palpable. We thank you for Paul's confidence in Christ and his amazing work in that people and we thank you that we worship the same living Lord and that he is at work in us and we thank you that we can be confident in our saviour and in our Lord.

Father God, I thank you for the partnership that we share in the gospel and the partnership that this church shares with missionaries spread all over the world and even now as we uphold Paul Barker in our prayers as he serves you and teaches your word and trains others in other countries as well.

[ 35 : 08 ] Father God, we thank you for this gospel that we have and for the hope that it gives us and for the hope that we can share with the world. Father, please help us to rejoice in this and this alone to our life's end and we ask it for Christ's sake.

Amen. Thanks.