

Partnership in Christ

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Date: 26 October 2014

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[0 : 00] When he began to dip behind the blue sea, old Ed would come strolling along the beach, clutching a bucket of shrimp.

He would walk to the end of the pier alone, but he wouldn't be there alone for long. You see, before long, distant white dots would morph into screeching, squawking seagulls engulfing him.

And Ed would toss the shrimp, and he would smile. And if you could hear him above the sound of the birds, you would hear him say, Thank you.

Now, one can imagine that as these events unfolded every day, Ed might in his brain be transported to another time and another place. You see, his full name was Eddie Rickenbacker.

And way back in time, he was a hero in the Second World War, a pilot. And on one particular mission, he was flying with his crew across the Pacific.

[1 : 01] They crashed, and all seven crew members survived. They crawled out of their plane, and they climbed into a life raft. And for days, they floated on the unforgiving waters of the Pacific. They fought the sun, they fought sharks, and most of all, they fought hunger.

Now, on day eight, the food ran out. So did the water. And they needed a miracle to survive. And so they prayed.

It was a very simple service, but the sentiment was profound. And then they tried to nap. And Eddie, well, he leant back. He pulled his cap down over his nose.

Time dragged on. And then Eddie felt it. A seagull had landed on his cap. And as old Ed described it, he sat perfectly still, planning his next move.

Then, with a flash of his hand, a squawk from the gull, he captured it and wrung its neck. The feathers were torn off, and equal parts were shared among the eight of them.

[2 : 09] Intestines were used for bait. Fish were then caught with the bait. That provided more bait and more food. And they survived until they were found after 24 days at sea.

And so, in an act of thanks, at the end of his days, old Ed would take a weekly walk on a Friday afternoon, with a bucket full of shrimp, to the end of a pier.

And with a heart filled with gratitude. Friends, the story I've told you is taken from a book by Max Licato. It's a true story. The book's called In the Eye of the Storm.

And it tells the story of a man who got things right. You see, he had been saved by a sacrifice. And he gave thanks. Not only with his lips, but by returning something costly.

Friends, today, as you know, is Thanksgiving Sunday. And it's a Sunday when we begin a new series of talks, of Bible talks on Philippians. And as it happens, we can mould the two together.

[3 : 11] They work together. So today, we're going to explore Philippians 1, 1 to 11, albeit briefly. We're particularly going to look at Paul giving thanks. And we're going to use that to think more broadly about how we too might be people of thanksgiving.

So let's get started. But in order to understand the book of Philippians, it's probably important to give you just a little glimpse from the book of Acts. So I'm going to tell you the story of what happens in the book of Acts in Acts chapter 16.

You see, Acts chapter 16 tells us the story of Paul and Silas coming to Philippi. We find out that Paul casts out a demon from a slave girl who's following him around and who has probably what we think might be a Pythonic spirit.

And that act of casting out the demon from her gets him into trouble, particularly with the people who are making money out of her ability because she stops doing it.

He ends up, therefore, being severely beaten and put in jail by some magistrates of the city. And anyway, when they're in jail, they start singing and praying. And there's a violent earthquake, not as a result of their singing and praying, I might say.

[4 : 20] But the foundations of the jail are shaken. The doors are burst open and their bonds are loosed. And the jailer fears, as you understand, that they've escaped.

And so he's about to kill himself when Paul says, don't do it. The jailer listens and he believes in Jesus and he and his whole household are baptized.

Then the magistrates tell the jailer in the morning to let Paul go. But Paul will have nothing of it. You see, he is a Roman citizen, unconvicted, uncondemned, illegally beaten.

And so he demands that they come and give him a public escort from jail. And he gets what he demands. Now, you know the question that I have? Undoubtedly, it occurred to the Philippian Christians as well.

And that is, why didn't he make these things known a bit earlier? You see, he could have saved himself a lot of pain and a very nasty beating, couldn't he, if he'd announced his citizenship, as he does later on in the book of Acts, before he gets the beating.

[5 : 25] My guess is, though, that the beating, plus the public recognition by the magistrates that no crime had been committed, gave those early Christians in Philippi some credibility and protection from harassment, at least for a little while.

In other words, you see, what I'm saying is, I suspect that Paul suffered for their good. In other words, I think he acted like his Lord. And if you were a Philippian Christian who'd seen all of this and heard this or heard the story, you'd have great respect and affection for this man, wouldn't you? Who was willing to suffer for you. And that affection reeks from this letter that we're going to look at over the coming weeks. So with that background, let's have a look at our passage and see what it says.

So open your Bibles at Philippians chapter 1. First, you'll see Paul gives his credentials. Although he's an apostle, he doesn't identify himself as that in this letter.

No, he calls himself a servant. And actually, our English translations don't do the right thing here, most of them, because the word's not actually servant, the word is slave.

[6 : 33] In other words, you see, what Paul is saying is he's not a ministry volunteer. No, he's a slave. Along with Timothy, he's a slave of Jesus Christ.

Then in the second half of the verse, he addresses all the Christians of Philippi along with their leaders. Then in verse 2, he gives a standard and heartfelt greeting. Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

But now let's look at him being thankful in verses 3 through to 6. You see, as he reflects on his friends, his heart overflows with thankfulness.

And he tells God all about it. That is, he expresses it. He thanks God as he remembers these people. In prayer filled with joy, he thanks God for two reasons.

I wonder if you can see them there. Look at the first reason. It's there in verse 5. He thanks them for their partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

[7 : 31] Now, that word partnership is the same word that's often elsewhere in the New Testament translated fellowship or sharing. Sometimes it has a sense of financial sharing and fellowship.

For example, let me tell you about 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 4, where Paul is saying these things about the Macedonian Christians, which involves the Philippians. Let me read to you and just listen for the word sharing as it's used here or fellowship or partnership.

He speaks to the Corinthians and he says, And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of very severe trial, their overflowing joy and extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

For I testify that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service of the Lord's people.

And they exceeded our expectations. They gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God also to us. They gave money. They gave money.

[8 : 48] They shared in the gospel. Here is gospel partnership, friends. Gospel sharing, gospel fellowship. One group of Christians who have experienced God's great act of grace in Jesus Christ.

That is a group of Christians who know God's love, who have been transformed by it. Who therefore want to be generous and gracious even as God is generous and gracious. And who therefore, you see, put aside consideration of their own poverty.

And they overflow with rich generosity to others. And did you hear the language? They beg or they plead for the privilege of sharing in, participating in, having fellowship in the service of the Lord's

people.

They say, please let us do this, Paul. That's the sort of sharing in the gospel that causes the apostle to pray with joy. You see, he sees this congregation that he's writing to. He knows what they're like. He knows where their heart is. And he prays with joy as he remembers these people. And their generosity. It is a mark, you see, that they have truly understood and embraced the gospel.

[9 : 50] For at the heart of the gospel is what? The grace of God in Jesus. The grace that says, God knew my poverty and gave his son out of his own riches for my benefit, my good.

The grace that says, Jesus lays aside his riches to become poor for us so that we might embrace the riches of God. You see, these Christians, these Philippians had embraced the heart of the gospel.

And you could see it in their deeds. And that fills the apostle Paul with the confidence that he expresses in verse five. Confidence that God who began this great work, this good work, will carry it to completion on the day of Christ Jesus.

So that's the first reason that Paul is thankful. He's thankful because of the partnership in the gospel expressed by the Philippians. They gave so that he might preach the gospel.

And that fills him with confidence. Now, verse seven, he goes on to the second reason for thankfulness. Can you see it there? Verse seven, Paul says, it's right for me to feel this way about you. I suspect that he means it is right for me to feel thankful this way.

[11 : 04] About all of you. That is, it's right for me to feel joy and confidence about all of you, as I've just expressed. Since I have you in my heart and whether I am in chains or defending or confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.

Paul's point, I think, is that he's thankful because he has them in his heart. That is, that he and they are bound together with deep affection. And therefore, whether he's in chains or whether he's out preaching the gospel, defending and confirming the gospel, they are sharers together.

And he knows this in God's grace. They're bound together in grace. They're bound together in longing for each other with all the affection of Christ Jesus. Friends, Paul's first reason for thankfulness is their sharing in gospel ministry.

His second reason is that they share in God's grace with him as he goes about gospel ministry. And he's very thankful for these things. Both, you notice, rotate around the gospel.

Did you see that? The gospel is at their center and the gospel drives these reasons for thankfulness. Now, let's briefly turn to Paul's prayer for the Philippians. Look at verse 9. The two parts again to Paul's prayer.

[12 : 14] These are obvious in that the original language has the word that in two places. So I'm going to reread these verses with the word that where it should be and is missing in the NIV translation.

Paul prays that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best. And then he prays that you may 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.

You see, what Paul wants for the Philippians is that they have a growing love in the present. And Paul wants the Philippians to have a complete and blameless character in the future when the day of Christ comes.

See, he wants them to be growing in Christ-like love in the present so that they might be able to know what is best in the present. But he wants them also to be pure and blameless so that when the day of Christ comes, they might be for the glory and praise of God.

Friends, there's our passage. We have, as I said, been also brief in our coverage of it. But I want you to notice what we've found. Two foci of thanksgiving.

[13 : 25] Paul thanks God for their partnership in the gospel. He thanks God that they share in God's grace with him as he goes about gospel ministry. Two foci for his prayer. He prays for increasing and more insightful love so that they might know how to act in the present.

And he prays for purity and blamelessness for the future day of Christ so that when it comes, they'll be filled with the fruit of righteousness. But did you notice something? Did you notice that there's one center and one goal?

Did you see it in the passage? At the center for Paul is the gospel about Jesus. You can see it in verses three to eight. God's gospel, you see, is all about Jesus.

God's gospel is all about what God is doing in his world. And the Philippians, they have taken that on board. They've grasped it and they've been grasped by it and they've partnered in it. They've shared in Paul's defending and confirming of it. They're centered on the right thing. But did you notice the goal? It's right there at the end of Paul's prayer. Look at the final words in verse 11. [14:29] It is for the glory and praise of God. Two foci for thanksgiving. Two foci for prayer. But one center, the gospel. And one goal, the glory and praise of God.

Now, friends, that's what we can learn from Paul about thanksgiving in this passage. And let our thanksgiving flow from the right center and let it have the right goal. Flow from the right center and understanding of what God has done in Christ in the gospel.

And let it have the right goal, the glory and praise of God. Now, I just want to reflect briefly on thanksgiving and us. Friends, we humans were created by God and for God.

We're created to give God glory and praise. But we, as human beings, have uniformly and spectacularly failed. In Romans chapter 1 verse 21, I want you to listen to what Paul says. He summarizes humanity in this way. He says, Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God, and listen to the next one, or gave thanks to him.

[15:44] Did you hear it? Although they knew God, they neither glorified him nor gave thanks to him. You see, they were created for that, but they didn't do it. And in their thinking became futile, their foolish hearts were darkened.

Can you hear it? As humans, we have failed to do what we were created for. We did not glorify God and we didn't give thanks to him. The focal expression of our sin, therefore, outlined by Paul here in one sense, is ingratitude.

That is lack of thanksgiving. And then comes the great news of the gospel. That great news is that God himself, in the person of Jesus, has entered our world. He loves that, and Jesus loves God. He loves God's ways. And his life is filled with thankfulness. It bursts onto his tongue regularly. I just listened to him. One example. I thank you, Father, says Jesus, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. He faces his death and he shares the Lord's Supper, as we're going to remember today. And as he does it, do you remember what he constantly does? He gives thanks as he does it. He thanks God as he breaks bread and shares the cup.

[17:00] And the writer of Hebrews tells us that he came into the world to do God's will. That is, to put God in his proper place. And through this, we are forgiven and redeemed because he dies in our place for us.

And we hear of that news through the gospel. And the mark that we have heard and received the gospel is what? That we turn from ingratitude, which characterizes humans, and we turn to thankfulness and thanksgiving.

We turn from thanklessness to thankfulness to thanksgiving. We give thanks. Friends, please hear this.

Very important. What is a mark? A distinguishing mark of Christians. It is thanksgiving. A defining and distinguishing difference between a Christian and non-Christian is that the Christian is characterized by thanksgiving.

We who know God through Christ live as we were created to live. Thankful people. We live thankfully. The psalmist says it this way. We enter his gates with thanksgiving.

[18:11] That is, we come into his presence with thanksgiving. We give thanks to him. We bless his name. We thank him for his son. We thereby honor him. As God himself says in Psalm 50 verse 23.

The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me. You see, God is glorified by our thanks. Because we are being as he made us to be.

Friends, if we believe in the gospel, we believe in grace. And if we believe in grace, we will be thankful, won't we? Because we don't deserve it. What else can we be if we are recipients of what we don't deserve?

Well, we must be thankful. Because we gave nothing. The best, the most, the only thing that we can do as recipients of a gift is to be thankful.

But that begs the question, doesn't it? After all, how does thankfulness express itself? Well, it can express itself on our tongues, can't it? Paul does it in our passage.

[19 : 13] It can express itself in praise, in thanks, in exaltation. We've done it in the songs we've sung so far. But let me tell you that praising, using our tongues, doesn't exhaust thankfulness.

No, it can express itself in lots of other ways. It can express itself in obedience, in godly living. It can express itself in prayer, as it does here in Philippians 1.

Prayer for godly lives. Prayer for more people to be converted to Jesus, and therefore to be able to live lives of thankfulness along with us. Prayers like Paul prays here.

Prayer for love to abound, for knowledge and depth of insight, for discernment of what is best, for people filled with the fruit of righteousness, the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

But thanksgiving is not exhausted by the tongue. Thanksgiving is reflected in lives. It's reflected in a life given over wholly and joyfully and spontaneously to God.

[20 : 16] Not in slavish obedience, but in joyful thanks. Like the Philippians, they grasped it. They knew it.

They understand it, understood it, and they lived it. Pleading with Paul. You can imagine, you see, please, please, Paul, let us give of our poverty.

Please let us give whatever we can. We want to stretch ourselves as much as we can, because we have received the generosity of God ourselves. And we want to be like God.

And we want to say thanks to him. And we want to be generous. Please, we beg you. Let us do this. Giving themselves first of all to the Lord, and then giving out of their poverty so that others might be blessed like them.

Letting their overflowing joy and extreme poverty, as Paul says, well up in generosity. Friends, on this Thanksgiving Sunday, I want to urge you to be thankful, people.

[21 : 21] Thankful for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that tells us of God's overwhelming gift for us in Jesus. I want you to be thankful in your hearts.

Thankful with your lips. Thankful with your lives. If you have the ability, thankful with your wallets. Thankful in your relationships.

I want you to be so overwhelmed with God's generosity in Jesus that you live as God created you to live, in thankfulness. And so may we together be so grateful for God's immeasurable riches of grace toward us in Christ Jesus that our lives will overflow with similar grace and generosity.

Now let's pray. God bless you.

could I say that you are a part of ouraju