

Praying from the Heart

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[0 : 00] Today begins a series of ten sermons on the epistle of Paul to the Philippians, and I would like you to turn to it and put your thumb in it and close your Bible and listen for a few minutes, and then we'll open it up and look at it.

I would, because there's going to be ten sermons, I would commend to you that you purchase a commentary on Philippians so that you can stay, you can keep up to the sermons each week, and that you can perhaps know better than the preacher.

And you will find such a commentary helpful. Tomorrow is the epiphany, and the epiphany is the breaking out of light in the midst of darkness, and the wise men coming to see, coming in search of what they have long been seeking.

And I pray that for you, this service might be, in some senses, the culmination of discovering something which you have long been seeking.

The wise men were looking for a king, and they found the wrong one. And that's the story of human history. The exaltation of a king, only to find that he is not the king who is born of God for the purposes of implementing God's rule in the world.

[1 : 49] They sought for a king, and they came to Herod, and he was the wrong one. And our world is full of Herods that are seeking to maintain power and are threatened by the advent of light.

So they went to Herod, and Herod found that his chief priests and scribes knew where the king was to be born. And so they proceeded to Bethlehem, as Gene has told us.

And they weren't the only ones to proceed to Bethlehem. Herod proceeded to Bethlehem, too. They came to worship the king. Herod came to murder him.

The world has since been divided into two parties. One who seeks the authority of God in Jesus Christ, and one who seeks to destroy that authority and assume it for themselves.

And you will find that by looking a little carefully at your own life, you will have the same inclination, either to find and worship the king or to seek and destroy him.

[3 : 13] I assume that you are seeking him and would worship him. I want you to imagine at this the beginning of a new year and the festival of the epiphany, that you might be among those who, knowing where the king was to be born, but perhaps hitherto you have not got free to go and look for him.

And I would tell you on the basis of Philippians chapter 1, verses 1 to 11, that why you must seek such a king.

A king who has an eternal kingdom and who has a radical agenda for the members of that kingdom.

So, I'll just give you the background on this letter. Among archaeologists, there are those who think that Philippi may have been the birthplace of St. Luke, the Greek physician, who records the story in the Acts of the Apostles of the establishment of a church in Philippi.

Philippi was a city which was built by Philip the Great. And it was a fortified city and it guarded the way from Europe to Asia so that many travelers going from Europe to Asia would go through Philippi.

[5 : 12] It is significant that the first converts to the Christian faith in Philippi were a Greek, a Roman, and an Asiatic.

The seller of purple was from Asia, the Roman jailer, and the Greek slave girl were the three converts.

On the basis of these people then came Paul's preaching and a congregation of believers was established in Philippi.

And this letter is the result of Paul who at the time of writing was a prisoner in Rome.

Some suggest that he was manacled and at the other end of the chain was a member of the Praetorian Guard.

[6 : 21] What a glorious job to have to be on a short chain with St. Paul. I wish I could put you all on a short chain with St. Paul to live with.

He, in a burst of love and affection, writes this most amazing letter.

I would say that of all the letters of the New Testament. But when you spend time looking at a letter like this, it becomes more amazing the more you read it.

So this most amazing letter and a letter requires two things. It requires the question of what the writer meant to say and what the receivers of the letter understood him to say.

I will often get a letter which I will read and put down and think no more of it and then my wife will pick up the letter and will be and I will be amazed at what she sees in it that I never noticed.

[7 : 42] So you see, you need someone who writes a letter and someone who understands it and that's what these ten sermons are about to help us to understand understand the implications of what are there, what's there in its immediate application in our own lives.

I want to say this about Paul and I would love you to try and contend that this isn't true but I would say and you can challenge this as much as you like, I would say that St. Paul by his writing has laid the foundations for the whole of Western society.

In the gospel he preached, in the doctrine he taught, in the things he suffered and in the wisdom he shared.

Now, Western society won't acknowledge that but I think anybody who could look objectively at the situation might come to agree that much of what we know and is what is best about Western society derives from St. Paul who must have been a brilliant, brilliant man but he wasn't honored as a brilliant man he thought of himself as a slave and he ended up in prison and being put to death.

Well, my prayer is that we as a congregation may come to a deep understanding of the teaching of Paul not the kind of understanding that you store in your computer but the kind of understanding that brings meaning to every minute of every day that brings meaning to every mile you journey that bring meaning to every dollar you invest that brings meaning to every word you speak to every dream you dream and to every person you encounter.

[10:08] I was startled by a sentence I read this week which I found extremely helpful it's one of those things you've always sort of had in the back of your mind but then somebody puts it into one sentence and you say ah, there it is now what this sentence said was in fact that every Christian is a contemporary to his own generation and his own culture he is in addition a contemporary to Jesus Christ so that there are those two things in our life we are contemporary to our own culture the food we eat the clothes we wear the jobs we have the place we live all of these things are part of what our culture gives to us but then and you can find out about it every day in the Vancouver Sun and but then you are contemporary to Jesus Christ and that means in the midst of your involvement in the contemporary world you acknowledge that Jesus Christ is your contemporary it's quite an embarrassing thing to do if you're in a restaurant eating a fine meal and you bow your head to say grace you see you're receiving what your contemporary culture can give you and you're acknowledging that it comes from Jesus Christ you are receiving you are reading the Vancouver Sun to understand your contemporary culture you're reading the Bible to acknowledge that you are a contemporary of Jesus Christ so the we're caught in the in the situation where we have our contemporary involvement which is very demanding indeed and we have the option of submitting to the teaching of God through the through the apostle Paul concerning the kingdom of which

Jesus Christ is king so that's where we live our lives so we're caught in the middle of that situation and I would like to remind you that as a particular congregation here today this is a unique event in the whole history of the world that the combination of people that you represent your ethnic origins your level of education your place of birth your your language your involvement in the culture all these things are different for each one of us and we come together not to have them all melted into one glorious hallelujah but in a sense to identify the wonder of so many people coming from so many different backgrounds to acknowledge to seek for the one who is born to be king so that's what we are as a congregation and I would like to contend that the most important thing you do in in the week is to be here at church you know because you don't have to go out into the culture the culture comes after you and makes you its prisoner for most of the week but here you can declare your freedom and come to church and what can happen at church can't happen in the world in the culture you are contemporary to here you find yourself a sinner in need of forgiveness here you are able to acknowledge the fact that you do not belong to yourself the world thinks you do you are sick and you need to be healed you may have come for the purpose of pleasing another person but what would please that person most would be for you to discover your own needs being met you are part of a community that will never be together again in time and space and so you should make the most you can of your relationship to one another as you come together this morning you you may by your own background feel yourself estranged by the music or the liturgy or the architecture you may look at other people here and say

I don't belong you may be here under the circumstance that you and your wife or husband are not speaking to each other but you both want the other to know that you're still speaking to God and you're here because here you are confronted with the possibility of worshipping someone outside of yourself and that's a hard thing to do this is the place where you come face to face with who you are and who God is you know I I continually amaze that we can start this service by acknowledging the God under whom all hearts are open all desires known from whom no secrets are hid if you knew that before you walked in the door you probably wouldn't walk in the door but you're stuck now you've made that acknowledgement so that it's here you come face to face with hundreds of others in making a common statement of your faith in the creed here you share with hundreds of others a common meal you bring to this service your own unique person with your own unique background and your own unique gifts and you are understood as such it is here that you can among your contemporaries find the widow with only two coins you might as your contemporary you might find the gathering demoniac whose heart's cry is what have you got to do with us with me

Jesus son of the most high God you may find among yourselves the man who's fallen among thieves you may meet the woman who's had five husbands and is now living common law you may meet the man who for thirty pieces of silver would betray his best friend you may meet the elderly person who is looking for a way to depart in peace from this world it is here you have the opportunity to leave the splendid castle of your own self-centeredness and join a community of praise and prayer which allows you to be what you were meant to be and to do what you were meant to do you can come to church and patiently endure the service and the sermon and the sacrament and go away saying

I don't belong if you do you will find it very difficult to find the place where you do belong this is the place where you are known and these are the people to whom you in fact belong now culturally we're conditioned to pretend there's nobody here but me really but the fact is you are surrounded by people with whom you have all the most important things of your life you hold in common with those people and you should be willing to make yourself known to them and they to make themselves known to you and not to live in your splendid isolation but culturally we're trained not to do that and we have to find grace in order to be able to do that here you may discover both the source and meaning of your life here you may discover your true vocation and it's not to be a lawyer or a ditch digger or a doctor or a professor or an ambulance driver it's to try find your those are just incidental to your life it's to find your true calling from God through he who is born to be king so here you are set you are to set your watch you know that each of you has a watch of his own and for each of you it is a different time we get along better if we all have the same time but in terms of

[20 : 41] God's purpose in our life it's a different time for all of us and you need to know what time it is for you here it becomes possible to delight in and not covet what your neighbor has the possibility of loving your brother rather than murdering him your sexuality is something which is entrusted to you your parents are people your parents are people to whom you were once totally dependent but who come to the place where they will be totally dependent upon you so what does this have to do with Philippians 1 1 to 11 well I'll begin my sermon and tell you here's what it has to do if you now take and open the book where you have your thumb and look at

Philippians 1 you will see that there are two men Paul and Timothy who are at the very pinnacle of the church of their time and yet who describe themselves as the servants of Jesus Christ the leaders are to be the servants that's a contradiction in the nature of the kingdom you will find that the letter is addressed to all the saints in Christ Jesus and what Paul means by this is that the people of God who through the whole of the Old Testament were those under the old covenant now the people of God are a people under a new covenant these people were all ethnically of the same origin these people are of every ethnic origin and language and culture and yet they are to be seen as in a sense the

Jews of the new covenant and Paul describes them as such by saying that they are saints in Christ Jesus the incidental thing about that is that they happened to live at a particular time and a particular place and that was Philippi and that they had overseers and deacons they had a chain of command now Paul says that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ and his apostolic teaching is passed on through Timothy through the leaders of the church through the servants of the church and to the people of the church so that they're living in the line of apostolic succession there is that line of and that's you see where the diocese of

New Westminster is in great difficulty at the moment because at the time of the reformation what happened in Europe was that the church said we are going to be loyal to the apostolic teaching of the New Testament and what the Roman Catholic church said we are going to be loyal to the apostolic succession which comes from Peter down through the popes and continues day in and day out and there was that competition well then at the reformation what the Anglican church did that was peculiar was to say we want to stay in the line of apostolic succession but we also want to affirm the apostolic teaching and we don't want there to be any separation between apostolic teaching and apostolic succession and you see the tension in this diocese now is there is another attempt as there has been many times before to separate apostolic succession from apostolic teaching obviously the best answer is to become a

Baptist but but there is there is there is there is there is some historic meaning and some foundation to the fact that we want to hold those two things together well that's what happened that's what Paul says to the saints in Christ Jesus with your overseers and with your deacons time goes but let me let me show you one or two things verse two there is G and P that's the fuel by which you by which a congregation of this kind lives we have to be fueled with grace and peace which comes from

[26 : 30] God we don't have any resource to find that in our own lives grace and peace come from God through Christ G and P and we need that fuel in order to be the church that that he wants us to be well in the in the last verse of the passage Philippians 1 verse 11 you will see another G and P so that what happens is that God gives to the church grace and peace to fuel it and the church gives to God glory and praise grace and peace to us glory and peace from us in the worship of God and so he goes on to say because of his great affection for these people that I thank God every time I remember you in all my prayers for all of you

I pray with joy this is a man who is manacled to a soldier and in a prison and has been there for at least many months and who says I pray with joy at the remembrance of what is it he's remembering what God is doing in this congregation in Philippi in Macedonia and he's even though he's separated by hundreds of miles he is present with them in prayer and sharing the joy with them and so he says and that they are sharing with him so that in verse six very key verse being confident of this that he who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus so the there verse five ends with from the first day until now from the beginning and you read in

John chapter one in the beginning God in the now is Philippi or this congregation right here right now and to the day of Christ Jesus the beginning the now and the day of Christ and that's this time cycle that we are locked into and in that time cycle you see in verse six that what is happening in Philippi and what Paul is aware is happening there is that that God has begun a good work among them and he will carry it on to completion so that the really significant thing about you as a congregation is that God is at work in you to do what is to his own praise and glory and the big question that raises is to what extent are you willing both to allow

God to do in you what it is his purpose to do and to share with one another the reality of that God working in you and it is only as you are as a congregation and able to allow God to work in you and in your relationship to one another that you will in turn allow God to work through you that's it's only as God works in you that he can work through you and in verse 7 he tells them what it is he wants to do through them he wants them as a group to share the suffering Paul was suffering in prison in Rome and they were because they were in Christ Jesus they were to share in that suffering and so we are to share in the suffering of one another but then we're also to share in something else and

Paul says I am in chains but I'm still involved in defending and confirming the gospel defending the gospel means taking this alien world or culture in which we live and showing them the gospel telling them why the gospel is the purpose of God so you defend the gospel to those who are not believers and you confirm the gospel to those that are and that's the work that God does through them as they allow God to work with them so it goes to the end and Paul testifies that he works with the affection of Christ Jesus now that's you see when you're told to love somebody the problem you have with it we all have with it is we don't have it in me to love that person you know that it just is impossible and we're quite realistic and quite rational and quite reasonable about it's quite impossible that I should love that person or that

[32 : 21] I should continue to love that person but Paul doesn't get caught off base on that he says I love them with the affection of Christ Jesus it's from him that I draw my love for them it's not from my limited little capacity and so he says I can testify how I long for you I yearn for you with the affection of Christ Jesus and then he goes on and says that and this is very important you see love look in verse nine love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight now we would say well when I get to know that person maybe I will love them but Paul says no no when you get to love that person maybe you'll know them so you are required to love one another as a means of getting to know one another and in getting to know one another you can discern what

God is doing in and through that person so you will see that you end up being called to be pure and blameless until the day of of Christ in verse 10 and to prove what is best and the way you prove what is best is to by allowing God to do his work in you not trying to do something for him or to accomplish some great thing on your own but to allow God to work in you and he does that by his grace and peace remember from the benediction the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds and the knowledge and love of God and of his son Jesus Christ the peace that God introduces into your life and there is no other source for peace in our world except the peace which comes from the reconciliation which

God has effected with us in Christ so the grace and peace become the resource or the fuel by which we as a congregation are to live our lives and to gather together on this Lord's day to give to the God who has made himself known to us in Christ to give to that God glory and praise and then verse 11 talks about fruit you know the idea is not that you are to pay God back for what he's done for you by doing some work for him the result is that as God works in you he will produce fruit through you it will be something that grows there as the result of God working in you and for that reason you will give him because you've been given grace and peace you'll give him glory and praise and that's what you're doing here this morning can you think of a greater privilege amen