

Servants And Saints

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 June 2021

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Paul's letter to the Philippians, Paul's letter to the Philippians, reading at the beginning of chapter 1. 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.

John Duncan, or Rabbi Duncan, as he was known in his time, was at one time on a mission to Budapest, to the Jewish people in Budapest.

And he spoke about two converts that came themselves actually to be ministers of the gospel following that conversion. But he spoke about them in this way.

He said, they used to read day after day the epistles of Paul as if they had been letters that had come by that morning's post.

As if they had come by that morning's post. That was the relish they had. That was the appetite they had for the letters of Paul. And would that that were true of ourselves increasingly.

[1 : 25] We trust that it is to a measure at least. But that wonderful description of Rabbi Duncan, of these two men, is something that's really hugely challenging to ourselves, isn't it?

Because to read the Bible with relish, with that deep hunger, is something really hard to maintain. In fact, it's so hard that we need the grace of God to enable that to be kept up in our souls.

And you and I, I'm sure you agree, find that that description of Rabbi Duncan's so challenging.

Because we find ourselves, sometimes, perhaps even often, often or certainly than we would like, coming to the Word of God, to the Word of Scripture, without that relish, without that deep appetite and exercise for this Word to come to be received into our hearts.

And I want to begin tonight a study for our evening services of this letter to the Philippians. And let's pray that God will actually give us, not just for this study, but all the time, that we get something of that spirit of these two converts in Budapest.

That we will receive this as if it had come just newly to us in the morning post. As if we had not read it before. And have come to see with relish what it contains.

[2 : 50] And we're just looking at the introduction this evening. It'll take us some time, God willing, to go through the epistle. It's a wonderful letter. It's a letter that's full of a variety of different topics.

Some theological, some very practical. And as we go through it, we trust that God will guide our thoughts and minds and feed our minds to it.

Now, Paul's introductions mostly, almost all of his introductions to his letters, are of a similar kind.

And they're of the kind that puts together various things that he then will open up as he goes through the rest of the epistle.

And it's the same here. You find the same in Romans, for example. The beginning of Romans, where he talks of himself as a servant, called and set apart for the gospel of God.

He then describes that gospel and the substance of it in Jesus Christ. And then the rest of the epistle really opens up these wonderful themes in the introduction.

[3 : 53] And it's the same here with Philippians. Because, as we'll see tonight, what he speaks here of as servants and saints in Christ Jesus, grace and peace from God.

These are the things that really he then expands on and opens up for us as we go through the rest of this very short but wonderfully descriptive epistle.

Now, he was writing this from prison. We're not told exactly where he was, but most commentators have taken the view that, rightly I think, that he was actually in Rome awaiting the outcome of his trial in Rome, something you find described in the 28th chapter of the Book of Acts.

Remember, he had appealed to Caesar with regard to the accusations made against him. So, there he was in Rome and in prison in Rome, not confined to a cell all the time, but nevertheless

imprisoned and chained.

We read from this letter itself, it talks about his chains in Christ Jesus. He would be chained to a guard all the time. And it makes it all the more surprising when you realize that that's the background to this letter that he wrote to the Philippians.

[5 : 10] The visit he had to the Philippians where he established, through God's grace, the church in Philippi some 20 years before he wrote this epistle. But it makes it all the more surprising, in a sense at least, that this letter is so full of joy.

And it really just fills your mind with questions as to how, how does this man have this satisfaction and this joy when he's describing himself as being imprisoned and not able to do what he would like to do in being abroad openly with the gospel?

And there are various parts of the epistle that would answer that question to us. And it's especially to be found in his relationship with Jesus. It's his relationship with Christ.

It's what Christ is to him. It's what Christ means to him. That's the key to Paul's joy and to the fact that he speaks of joy so much in this letter.

Now, we're looking tonight at the introduction, as I said, and there are two things here especially that we want to notice. Two of the descriptions, and we'll just follow these out for the rest of the evening.

[6 : 22] First of all, the description of himself and Timothy as servants of Jesus Christ. And then secondly, the description of the Christians, the people in the church in Corinth, as saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons.

We leave that reference to the overseers and deacons for another time. But first of all, servants, he says, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus.

As you probably know, in the Greek of the New Testament, the same word is used for servant as it is for slave. So what he's really saying literally is, Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus.

And that may surprise us that he could talk of himself as a slave. But you must put out of your mind any idea of slavery that you can take from what we normally think of in terms of the slavery of the slave trade, as it were, where people were brought from the likes of Africa, abroad to America and to the West Indies to be slaves on plantations there.

That's not the idea of slavery at all that you have to have in mind when you think of this word as used in the New Testament of those who are in Christ Jesus. Because the word really includes the word at the very heart of its meaning.

[7 : 50] The word has to do with bond service, being bonded to someone, just like you find a slave is bonded to the slave owner.

Although we think of slavery as something really bad, and in many ways, of course, it was and is. It's still going on in the world in human trafficking.

And we have to remember that. But the slavery here, the word slave, really means being bonded to somebody who is your master.

And that's the idea, that's the meaning that Paul wants us really to take from this word and the way that he uses it and the way that he develops it. So he is really, and Timothy, are bond servants of Jesus Christ.

They are servants bonded to Jesus, united to Jesus, tied to Jesus. And that's what's really led to the kind of life that they're living. And that, in fact, for Paul especially, is what's given him his authority as an apostle.

[8 : 53] We go to Romans, for example, chapter 6. It's one of the chapters we could have read because it's very much tied up with what we're saying here and what we're seeing here in Philippians and the use of the word slave.

Romans 6 and verse 20. When you were slaves, he's saying, of sin you were free or you were detached in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?

The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end eternal life.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. And you see what he's saying there. You were once, he says, bonded to sin.

That was your master. That's how we all are natively. That's how we all are as we come into this world. That's the master we serve. That's the master we serve willingly until Jesus comes and God

comes and changes our life and turns it around.

[10:09] And you see what Paul was saying there. You were slaves of sin, but having been freed from that, Christ having come and broken the chains that kept you tied to sin under its slavery, you are now bonded to God.

You are in Christ bonded to him as his bond servants. A very different type of slavery to what you had as bond servants of sin.

And that's why in Philippians here, chapter 3 and verse 12, you find Paul saying that this is what Christ actually saved him for.

He says, not that I've already obtained or I'm already perfect, but I press it on to make it my own. That's the very thing that's awaiting him, really, even going as far as eternity and glory.

I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. He has taken hold of me. He has taken possession of me. And that's really one of the wonderful things about being a Christian.

[11:19] You are not actually in your own possession, as it were. You don't have charge over your own life. You have come to be bonded to Jesus who's taken over your life and taken control of your life.

And so two things you can say follow on from that. First of all, Paul and Timothy belong to Jesus. So does everyone who has come to be bonded to Christ, united to Christ, taken by God away from the slavery of sin and sin as our master to be bonded to Jesus.

It's under the ownership of Christ. In 1 Corinthians chapter 6 verse 19, you remember how Paul put it there? You are not your own. You are bought with a price.

He was talking there about ethics, about lifestyle, about how we actually live and live a life of holiness. Because he says, you're not your own. You have been bought with a price.

You were bought with a price. What was the price? What was paid? What was the cost of translating us from slavery to sin to be bond servants of Jesus?

[12:36] It is nothing less than the death of Jesus. The blood of Jesus. That's what it cost. That's what it took. That's why we can never treat sin lightly or think that we're in charge of our own lives as sinners.

And Paul is not bonded to Jesus now as a bond servant unwillingly. He's not a slave of Jesus in that good sense we've tried to explain it in.

He's not there unwillingly. It's not something he's been forced into. Paul has fallen in love with Jesus. Jesus has revealed himself to him and come into his life in such a way that Paul is willing above all things to be bonded to Jesus.

To have Jesus as his master because he realizes there is no better way in which his life can be controlled, can be under somebody else's authority and somebody else's control than to be under the mastery of Jesus.

You could say that Paul is now captivated with the very one who took him captive, if you like, spiritually.

[13:49] These two words have the same root, captivated and captive. He is a captive in a good sense. Jesus has taken him into his custody, his care, his security to look after his life and the result of that is Paul is captivated with Jesus.

He's taken up with Jesus. He's drawn to Jesus. There's such an attraction in Jesus for him which of course is the very opposite to what was once true of him.

He hated Jesus. He hated the thought of Jesus. He hated the thought of people coming to be disciples of Jesus, to be followers of Jesus until Jesus himself met him on the way to Damascus and turned his life around and from that moment Paul is absolutely delighted and filled to be a servant of Jesus, to be a bond slave of Jesus.

And the second thing from the meaning of this word to be bonded to Jesus, to be a bond servant, not just that he belongs to Jesus but that he now lives to please Jesus.

Look at chapter 1 here verses 20 to 21. Talks here about his imprisonment but he's hoping it'll turn out eventually for his 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 honored in my body whether by life or by death for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

[15:32] And that's the second thing that follows on from the fact that he's a servant of Christ Jesus, a bond servant. He belongs to Jesus but he now lives to please Jesus.

That's really the key in a sense to his life and to his lifestyle. Now all of us as indeed you find from Romans 6 and other passages of the Bible we are all slaves of something or someone.

It is not the case that we are not enslaved to something or other as human beings. It doesn't matter what atheism might say to you or humanism might say to you.

Now we just read from Romans 6 and verse 16. Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves you are slaves of the one whom you obey either of sin which leads to death or of obedience which leads to righteousness.

And that really is our basic human problem. It amounts to the fact that we want to live to please ourselves to follow our own inclinations. That's what sin has done to us.

[16:43] That's the essence of our sinfulness. Now we don't want Jesus to rule over us. We want to be in charge of our own lives. We think that living the way we want to live equals freedom.

That's what you hear so often in the world. That's what you hear from those who care not for the gospel and want to live free of such encumbrances as they see it. That's what you hear from those who push humanism and atheistic philosophies onto us.

That's what you actually find promoted sadly through some of our education topics and curricula for children and for young people.

Be yourself. Live for yourself. Live as you want to live. You're free to do that. Exercise that freedom. That's what we're told. But that's not freedom.

Freedom is not living the way you want to live. The way you like to live. The Bible's view of freedom is freedom to live as we ought to live. As God wants us to live.

[17:56] In a way that pleases God as bond servants of Jesus. And you know the pressure on young people is absolutely enormous today through this kind of atheistic philosophy and humanistic philosophy to give them the impression you're in charge of your own life.

You can do what you want. Just think whatever it is you want go for it. That's the kind of life that you should live. That's what you should think about. That's your priority. And the pressure from that is unbearable because it comes to a point where what that essentially is doing is making a God of yourself isn't it?

Because here is Paul saying Christ is in charge of my life. God is in control of my life. When you put God out of the picture you make yourself God. You make human beings into gods.

Because if the philosophy is forget the Bible we've done with that. That's old hat that's old fashioned. That's gone by the wayside. And it's better to be rid of it altogether.

Well that just makes a God of yourself. You're elevating yourself into being in control of your own life and destiny. And it doesn't end up with happiness.

[19:11] It ends up with all kinds of anxieties and all kinds of difficulties for mind as well as for body. And sadly sometimes it even ends up in young people not being able to take the pressure anymore and self-harming are even worse.

and that's increasingly the case in our society. And it comes back to this that they are taught that they are in charge of their own lives.

And for you young people tonight who are listening or here tonight please think of what God is saying. Please think of who it is created you who it is you need to take charge of your life.

What is the best master to have in your life? And it has to be Jesus. doesn't it? Because every other master will not only disappoint and end in failure but will actually turn on you in the end and leave you in despair and in hopelessness.

And here is Paul and Timothy bond servants of Christ Jesus. You know I wonder if the slave girl that we read about in Acts 16 who was one of the first to form the nucleus of the church in Philippi.

[20:33] We're assuming that she was converted. It appears from the narrative that that was the case although it doesn't specifically say so. But isn't it amazing the founding members of the church in Philippi, Lydia, this well-to-do woman, this slave girl, and the Philippian jailer who would have been a Gentile.

They were the founding members in establishing under Paul's preaching the apostleship, the church in Philippi. And we just wonder, I wonder if she was there 20 years or so after.

She was changed by Paul and that spirit, that bad spirit was was ejected by the power of Christ. Was she still there when this letter would be read?

Was she still in Philippi listening to this letter that had come from the apostle through whom the church was established and that she had known in her past?

Was she there when this letter was read? Because it would have been read as a letter to the church. It would have been read to the Christians there. Well, if she was, she would certainly relate very meaningfully to what Paul was saying.

[21 : 45] She'd be able to say, that was me. I was enslaved to these evil powers. Those who owned me were using me in fortune telling to make money for themselves.

But Jesus released me from that. I know what it's like, she would say, to have gone from the bad slavery of sin and the sinful lifestyle to the good slavery of being a bond servant of Jesus. So for me that's the question, and for you that's the question tonight. both for you online and for us here, what is life about for us?

Who is in charge of your life? By what power is our life being directed? What does Jesus mean to us?

Where is Jesus in my life, in your life? Are you tonight, willingly and gladly, a bond servant of Jesus?

[22 : 47] Do you agree with what the apostle is saying, that the best thing that ever happened in his life, the best thing that could have happened in his life, is when Jesus made him his bond servant.

Now there's one other thing in the use of this word, slave or servant, bond servant, I'm not going to deal with it tonight because we're going to come across it in a wonderful passage in chapter 2, eventually, God willing.

And it's there in verse 7, it's exactly the same word that's used here as Paul uses of himself and Timothy. In chapter 2, of course, in verse 7, it's about Jesus, where he says, Jesus in verse 6, though he was in the form of God, that is, fully God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made of himself nothing, taking the form of a servant.

And that word servant is exactly the same word. He became a bond servant, he became a slave of the Father, in the good sense that we've tried to explain.

And that really carries us into something absolutely amazing, that the Son of God, and really in that chapter in Philippians, as we'll see eventually, it's there to be a direction to us as to what it means to be a Christian, and to live in humility, one with another, and to think of others better than ourselves, that's what the Son of God did.

[24 : 17] He became the bond servant, the bond servant, in order to save his people from their sins. So, they are servants of Christ Jesus.

But they're also, he's saying, he's writing here, Paul and Timothy, to all the saints in Christ Jesus. Now, we use the word saint very commonly as somebody that lives an exemplary lifestyle.

We very often use the word in such ways, would say of such and such a person, that's a real saint. That person is undoubtedly a saint, a really wonderful person to know, kind, all sorts of things like that.

But that's not the meaning, essentially, of the word saint here in the Bible at all. it comes from the word to make holy. And essentially it means God setting apart people for himself to be his people. It's the idea of taking someone, setting them apart for his own use. It's not just people. The Old Testament, you find things used and spoken of as holy things, the instruments in the temple, the things relating to the temple.

[25 : 34] They are holy to the Lord. God has taken them from their ordinary use and he's making them holy. He's making them setting them apart for his own use. That's essentially, that's at the heart of what the word saint really means.

And he's writing here to all the saints. Same as in verse three, where you find, I thank my God in all my remembrance of you always in every prayer of mine for you all.

He's wanting to emphasize as he begins this letter, he's not leaving anybody out. He's not thinking of anybody in Philippi other than they are in Christ Jesus, they are saints. As far as Paul is concerned, God has made them his people.

And that itself is an important concept for us. Because it means that everyone in the congregation in Philippi can regard themselves as saints, a saint in Christ Jesus.

Jesus. Now how can that be? Because there are obviously rivalries, difficulties, disunity, not as much as there was in the lives of Corinth, but as you go through the letter, as we'll see, there were problems in Philippi.

[26 : 47] Paul was making appeal to certain people there to live at peace with each other, for example, to think of others more highly than they thought about themselves, and giving the example of Christ in order to actually reinforce that.

How can he then call them saints if there are still some problems, if they're not perfect people, which they're not any more than we are? Well, the key to that is when he says here, in Christ Jesus. To all the saints, in Christ Jesus. That's the key to the meaning of sainthood. Because when you're in Christ, everything that Christ has done becomes yours.

That's the glory of being united and bonded to Jesus. The death that Jesus died is to you as if you had died it. A death that has dealt with sin, that's made an atonement for sin.

The resurrection of Jesus is as if you were actually there, and indeed you were spiritually in him as a Christian, but it's as if you did this yourself. That's the whole meaning of the righteousness of Jesus becoming ours as well, because when you're in Christ Jesus, God places the righteousness of Jesus on your account.

[28 : 07] He regards you as righteous, acceptable to him, fully acceptable to him, because the righteousness of Jesus is yours. That's how they are saints in Christ Jesus.

They're regarded by God as his, as his holy people, as his set apart, people. That really is a corrective many times to when we ourselves sometimes feel down, when we look in too much upon ourselves, although we can do too little of that as well, of course, but sometimes we look in on ourselves and we begin to really become disconsolate.

We lose our assurance. We just begin to think seriously about ourselves, whether we're Christians or not, looking at the evidence we find in our own hearts, that we still sin so much against God, and when we find it sometimes so easy not to read the Bible meaningfully and all these things.

Well, we look to Jesus himself, to being in Christ Jesus. Tonight, if you're in Christ Jesus, all is well with your soul.

That doesn't give us in any way a license or an excuse not to think seriously about sin, about following holiness. Romans 6 makes that clear to us as well.

[29 : 33] The fact that you're in Christ Jesus doesn't actually lessen your view of the seriousness of sin or the need to tackle sin and to overcome sin in your life.

It's the very opposite. The moment you're made a bondservant of Jesus, you want to be rid of sin. You're no longer going to be living for sin. You're no longer under its mastery.

Therefore, as Paul says frequently elsewhere, put away these things that were characteristics of the old life. And it's the same for everyone.

As Romans 6 again says, when you were slaves of sin, you were detached in regard to righteousness. For the end of those things is death.

But now that you've been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

[30 : 32] Now, note in closing what these two we might call relationship line, slave relationship lines lead to, where they begin and where they lead to, sin, unrighteousness, death.

death. That's the one line. But the other one is God being slaves of God, sanctification, the end, eternal life.

That's for Paul what it means to be saints in Christ Jesus. Not perfect people. Not people who can go about saying there's no sin left in my life at all.

Not people who can say I'm now much better than other people because I'm a Christian. That's not the kind of mindset that's planted in you when you become a Christian.

But people nevertheless who say in Christ Jesus I am acceptable and accepted by God. I'm one of His.

[31 : 35] I delight to be there. I want to remain there. I want to more and more please Him. And for all of us tonight, each of us is in one or other of these two lines.

The one that leads to death or the one that leads to eternal life. And there could be no more serious question to ask myself or for you to ask yourself.

So which is it for you tonight? Which is it for me? Are we tonight bond servants of Christ Jesus? Are we saints in Christ Jesus?

Because that's what God has given us the gospel for. That we be both of these to our own eternal advantage. May God bless these thoughts on His Word and bless us through His truth.

We're going to conclude tonight singing in Psalm 48a verses 9-14 that's page 63 in your Blue Psalm books.

[32 : 49] We contemplate your steadfast love within your house O God for like your name your praise extends through all the earth abroad. All that you do is righteous Lord Mount Zion's joy is great and Judah's towns rejoice as they your judgments celebrate.

Psalm 48a verses 9-14 We contemplate your steadfast love within your house O God for like your name your praise extends through all the earth abroad.

All that you do is righteous Lord Mount Zion's joy is great and Judah's towns rejoice rejoice as they your judgment celebrate.

Round Zion walk and count her towers through every city tell so that two children get on board and born our story you may tell for God the Lord who is our God forever will abide.

He is our God forever forever more and to the end of life.

[35 : 03] Now as you know by now please follow directions from those who are in charge of the door and if you do sanitize your hands please on the way past us as we are required to do for the moment.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen.