

Preparing Our Hearts

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: 29 May 2024

[0 : 00] In this chapter 1, we're going to look at the section verse 3 to 11, verse 3 to 11. We can just read again at the beginning of that section at verse 3.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

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. And so on.

How many of you came in here this evening and sat down and just let out a sigh? You come in from a busy week, you come in here this evening and you feel to yourself, well, thank goodness just for a time, just to sit, sit among brothers and sisters in Christ.

Sit and come to hear people praying. Sit and tune in our hearts in prayer and worship of God. Because I'm sure many of us come in this evening with that sense of feeling distracted, sense of looking at so many different things that are going on in our own lives or the lives of others.

[1 : 17] And our heads can just be a spin, a wash with different things. But we come and we should be thankful for this time just to pause, stopping for a few moments, looking beyond ourselves and our own situations and our own circumstances and come just for this time and focus on God and see and give thanks to him for what he is doing and has done for us.

When we sing through so many of the Psalms, we find that kind of experience in the Psalmist's life. A variety of different Psalmists, but very often they find themselves in these kinds of experiences that we have ourselves today.

So many different things going on, but just coming into the presence of God, stills them, calms them and gives them a new focus and a new sense of thankfulness.

And that's what we want to do each time we come to worship God. We want to be still and know that he is God. We want to be still in his presence. And as we come this evening and as we look ahead, God willing, tonight as we prepare our hearts and also as we approach the weekend preparing our hearts, a communion time is a time when we focus on the Lord.

When we think of what he has done for us. When we think of the peace that he has given to us through what he has done at the cross at Calvary.

[2 : 50] We come to God in prayer. We come preparing our hearts in prayer for this evening and for the days ahead. Each day we want to prepare our hearts by coming into the presence of God and seeking his peace and presence with us.

And we want to do that this evening by turning to this letter of Paul to the Philippians. And it gives us an insight into how to prepare our hearts before God.

Paul opens up his own heart before the people of Philippi and before his Lord here as he's writing to them from a prison cell. And you may expect to find someone who is downcast and despondent and in despair.

And yet as you read through this letter you find how uplifting it is. It is a letter that's often called the letter of joy. You find rejoice and you find joy and you find all of these words used often throughout the letter.

But that's not to say that everything was fine and well in Philippi. It had its problems like every church does. But Paul writes this letter to give them a real sense of focus.

[4 : 05] You get the sense of affection from Paul for the people of Philippi. As you see there in verse 3, I thank my God in all my remembrance of you. Often remembering, often praying for them and thanking God for them, for the partnership in the gospel that they have.

There's an affection for the people, but above all there's an affection for his saviour. And that is how they are together rejoicing in God.

And personal letters are an amazing thing. When you think of maybe letters you've received yourself, someone who's taken the time to write a letter, it shouldn't be disregarded.

Having been at sea myself, I received a number of letters when I was away in different parts of the world. And it was always so encouraging to get letters from home, to hear a little of what was happening.

It was before we could get emails on the ship, you were relying on the communication being through letters arriving. Some of them were amusing and some of them were moving, depending very much on who had written them and in what circumstances.

[5 : 18] But it was always a joy. And it's always so interesting going back and just looking over them again. And as a family, we've got another personal letter in our belonging.

And it dates back to 1940. And it was a letter written by my great uncle to my grandfather. My great uncle was still away from home.

It was during the war. And he was on a minesweeper. And my grandfather had been injured during the war. So he was now at home recovering. And reading the letter is very moving.

And you might think that the focus would be on maybe the troubles that are around my great uncle at that time. The things that were going on around him. But it wasn't.

It was a focus of love and concern and encouragement towards his brother who was back home recovering. And what makes it even more poignant is the fact that a few months later, my great uncle lost his life.

[6 : 22] When his minesweeper was sunk. So that letter has a special meaning behind it. And this memory goes on in many ways. But when we look at the letters that we find in the word of God, there's so much more behind them.

And there are letters that are not just personal to Paul and to the church at Philippi. There are letters that are personal to us.

They are written not just to the people then. They are written to ourselves today. They are letters that are here for our encouragement now. For our upbuilding now.

For doing all to us. To encourage us to a deep seated joy in the Lord ourselves. To remind us of the very reasons that we have to rejoice in God.

And we want to see in this section that we're looking at in verse 3 to 11. That the letter opens with this thanksgiving and prayer. They're not two separate things. They both go hand in hand.

[7 : 26] It's prayer and thanksgiving as one. And we want to just focus on this prayer for a time this evening. And just see what the prayer says to us. As we think of preparing our own hearts for coming to a communion weekend.

And there's three things I want to see about this prayer. There's a prayer here of thanksgiving. That's the first thing we'll see. Then secondly we'll see there's a prayer of confidence.

And then there's a prayer of growth. With a desire for growth. Thirdly we'll see. So the first thing we see here is a prayer of thanksgiving.

Having written the greeting in the letter in verse 1 and 2. Even the greeting itself. We shouldn't just scan over. You see there Paul and Timothy.

Servants of Christ Jesus. That's where they see themselves as servants of Christ Jesus. And they see the people of Philippi as saints in Christ Jesus.

[8 : 32] So we see there the relationship that the people have with Christ. And then grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There's a wonderful introduction there to the prayer. It's rich in Christ. And that's the theme that then continues as you go on into the main body of the letter.

And what we see first of all at its foundation is prayer and thanksgiving. The church at Philippi, it's not without its problems. And you might expect Paul to write to them as though the problems are going to be the main issue of the letter.

Things that are dividing the church. That are spoiling their fellowship. The struggles that the believers are facing. That the thanksgiving part of this letter might just be a short section.

But what you find is that that's not the case at all. The thanksgiving just continues to flow right through the letter.

[9 : 40] And there's lots going on in Philippi. You get that sense as you read through this letter that there are things going on in the background too. There's adversity. There's rivalry. There's conflict.

There's people looking for their own self-achievement. There's the struggle with finding the way to holiness. There's all kinds of different challenges going on among the people.

But what Paul is almost determined to give to the people, to show to the people as he writes to them, is the difference that a focus on Christ makes in all of that.

The way believers respond in all different situations is to have a focus on Christ. And when we think of our own lives, we can have all of these different things going on.

Different kinds of adversity, conflict, rivalry, a sense of seeking our own achievements. There's all sorts of things and struggles that we have in our lives.

[10 : 38] But Paul is writing to us to remind us, have our eyes fixed on Jesus. Thanksgiving, joy, and our eyes fixed on Jesus is what Paul is reminding our people of here and ourselves as well.

And so Thanksgiving doesn't just focus on one or two verses in this letter. It goes right through it. It's a thread that's running right through the letter.

You can look through this prayer. And in every verse, as we have verses to break it up for us in our Bibles, in every verse you see that there is something to give thanks for, something to give a sense of joy to the people.

Each verse has something. Paul in verse 3 is thankful to be able to remember the people. He is thankful that they are there, that they have not abandoned them, that they are with them.

In verse 4, you have a prayer that's full of joy. Thankful for the joy that there is. Verse 5, thankful for the partnership that there is in the Gospel.

[11 : 49] Verse 6, thankful for the confidence that there is in Christ. Verse 7, thankful for the grace of God in Christ. Verse 8, yearning with affection of Christ.

Thankful for that. Verse 9, the love and fellowship that they enjoy. Thankful for that. Verse 10, that there is the day of Christ to look forward to.

Thankful for that. Verse 11, thankful that it's all for the glory and praise of God. So you can go through this whole prayer. And there's a sense of thankfulness in every part of it.

Paul had his difficulties himself. He was writing this letter from prison. And yet, in verse 12 to verse 18 there, you see that his situation, his imprisonment, has all worked for the advancement of the Gospel.

He's thankful for that. And so it goes on. And so when we think ourselves of coming in here this evening, of sitting down with a sigh and just a thankfulness to be here, we start thinking, well, what do we have to be thankful for?

[13:02] When we come to God in prayer, what we are thankful for? So we've heard in both the prayers, so much to give thanks for, so much we often take for granted.

So much that we often feel it's just ours to have day after day, week after week. But yet, let's pause and prepare our hearts with a sense of thankfulness in prayer.

Thankfulness for all that is ours in Christ Jesus. Thankfulness for all that we have through his goodness and mercy each day.

Thankful for the Gospel. Thankful for the fellowship. Thankful for the fact that we can approach a communion season, that we can look forward to that with the freedoms that we enjoy.

We have much to be thankful for. Let us prepare our hearts as we seek to approach the Lord's Supper. Let us prepare our hearts with a prayer with a sense of thankfulness and joy in the Lord.

[14:07] The second thing we see here is it's a prayer of confidence. There's so much assurance in this prayer. The assurance that Paul is seeking the people at Philippi to have and enjoy themselves.

The assurance that he knows in his own life and experience. When we think of what a Christian needs to be able to have that joy of the Lord as our strength.

To be able to rejoice even in the midst of adversity. To be able to see our sin in our heart. But yet to be able to see the hope that Christ gives to us.

What do we need for that? Well it is confidence in the work of Christ. Not in ourselves. But confidence in the work of Christ for us and in us.

The work that is finished in Christ. And you see how Paul starts his prayer here in verse 3. What he says is, I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.

[15:20] He knows God. And he knows all the goodness that there is in God. And the confidence that this gives to him. As he is praying, even at a distance from the people of Philippi in a prison cell.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you. There is a confidence in God. And it's not just a confidence for a moment.

It's not just a confidence that is his. It is a confidence that every believer can have. And that's what he goes on to expand on.

As he prays for the people of Philippi. He says in verse 4, Always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy. Because of your partnership in the gospel from this day until now.

Then you have verse 6. And he says, And I am sure of this. There is confidence here in what he is about to say. 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.

[16:33] There is confidence. There is assurance there. I am sure of this. That he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.

And that is a word, a verse that every Christian needs to hear again and again. And to pray and to remember and to give thanks to God for that.

That it's not our work. It is the work that he has begun in you. And too often and so often, our focus can be on our work.

On how we see ourselves. Or how we think others would see us. But here Paul is reminding every one of us, It's not about us.

It's about the good work that he has begun in us. And that he will bring it to completion. How many of you have an unfinished project at home?

[17:42] I'm sure many of us will have something that we've started out on. A thing we've started with all good intention of completing this work. But it's still there.

Unfinished. It can be all kinds of things. It can be a DIY project. It could be a knitting. It could be a jigsaw. It can be all kinds of things.

And we start with all good intentions of finishing. But it's still there. And maybe it's not just one thing. Maybe there's, as we say, many irons in the fire.

We're trying to juggle so many different things. That nothing is getting done. Many things are left undone. But here we're reminded that when the Lord begins a work, he doesn't leave it unfinished.

He never leaves any work incomplete. It is finished. And here we are reminded that in every one of us who he has begun a good work in, he will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

[18:49] He will bring it to completion. Not us. He will do it. And so there is a great confidence.

There's a great assurance for us here. The writer James Boyce, he calls verse 6 here one of the three greatest verses in the Bible that teaches about the perseverance of the saints.

That's the teaching or the doctrine that no one whom God has brought into a saving knowledge of Christ Jesus will be lost.

And this is one of, he says, the three greatest verses. There's another two, he says, Romans 8, verse 38 and 39. That great passage that speaks of the fact that nothing will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

Nothing will separate us of that love. Those wonderful verses in Romans 8. The other text he has in mind is John 10, verse 27 and verse 28, where John 10 says, My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

[20:02] I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. There are these great texts of confidence and assurance that the people of God will persevere, that the Lord will keep them till the day of Christ.

And this is the other one. 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. And we all go through that times when we fear, these times when we fear, when we give God our lives and we trust in Christ that we are going to fail, that we are going to let them down.

And we do. We fail. We're afraid because we're not good enough and we're not good enough. And we're afraid because we might let people down.

And we do let people down. We do all of these things. And it's one of Satan's greatest weapons to think that then we are not Christians, that we're not good enough, that we are not saved.

But we have to come back to God, to Jesus, and focus on what he says to us. And these three great texts are where we can go and remind ourselves that when he works, when he loves us, when he calls us, nothing and no one can separate us from that love.

[21:35] Now the fact that God does all this, it does not imply that we are just passive, that we have nothing at all to do. We, the Bible tells us, must work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

We must come to God. We must trust in God. We must pursue him with all our heart. But it is he who works in us.

And then we delight in serving him, in honoring him, in being obedient to him with all our hearts. What a wonderful privilege it is to be the children of God and to know his love.

And doesn't that help to prepare our hearts as we come and approach the Lord's Supper? To know that we are doing it not for ourselves or through our own works or our own ways, but because he is working in us.

And he will bring that work to completion. He has done all things well. And let us remember that as we come to remember him.

[22:54] The third and final thing we see in this prayer, it's a prayer for growth. As Paul concludes his prayer here in verse 9 to verse 11, you see that it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more.

And so he goes on at the end of these verses. His desire is to see the church at Philippi flourish and the people at Philippi flourish in the Lord.

And that's the prayer that we long for ourselves as well. That our love may abound more and more for each other and for the Lord.

And this was a time when there were many against the Christian faith. And there was divisions going on. There was individual desires that were coming to the fore.

There was grumbling and questioning going on in the background. There was questioning the goodness of God. But what's the answer? Again, it's to focus on the Lord.

[24:06] That our love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment. That we might know God. That we might know his word and trust him with all our hearts.

There's both a learning from the word and putting that word into practice. Living by these truths. So they're not just things that we hear and listen to and enjoy together in a place like this.

But it's something that we put into practice in our daily lives, in our homes, in our communities. That we have a place to go. That we have a prayer we can offer.

That we have a saviour who is with us. That we remember all of these things. And we grow in our knowledge and our understanding of all of these things. And that we look forward with that sense of anticipation.

Because it speaks here of the day of Christ. that we will be presented to him. And that we will have that sense of joy as we live for him in this world.

[25:15] But always with that longing and looking forward ahead that Paul speaks of. Even in this letter himself, he speaks in verse 23 as he says, I am hard pressed between the two.

This is to go to be with the Lord or to stay. It's this dilemma that he has. So he's in this turmoil. But he has that wonderful message.

For me to live is Christ. As he goes on in this world. To live is Christ. And then when that time comes, to die is gain.

There is that confidence. That ongoing living for Christ. But with that great confidence and assurance that to die is gain. We still have so much to learn ourselves.

We still have so much to understand ourselves. And we will never know it all and understand it all in all its fullness. But we know that to know Christ and to love Christ is a precious thing.

[26:24] It is a gift of God. And so we let God's word be what instructs us and teaches us and gives us that growth.

That's what he speaks about when he speaks of in verse 9 knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent. As we go on, we go on through the teaching of God through the word of God to us not being taken and distracted by anything else but just having our eyes fixed on Jesus.

We have that wonderful blessing of Christ as our Lord. And so as we approach the Lord's Supper as we prepare our hearts in worship and praise of our Lord let us have that sense of thankfulness.

thankfulness for all that he has done and is doing for us and will do until the day of Christ until the day when it is complete.

Let us have that confidence in Christ that though we fail in so many ways we have that great assurance and confidence that he who began a good work and you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

[27:53] And may we have that longing and that desire to grow in our love that it may abound more and more and the knowledge and discernment of all of God's word and all of his truth to us that we would live by it.

The writer Aidan W. Tozer A. W. Tozer as he is more commonly known he speaks of God's people as the Bible describes them as those who are crucified with Christ.

Those who have come to believe in the Lord with all their heart and he says they have three distinct marks. And this is what he says of the Christian.

He says the first one is this they are facing only one direction. they are fixed on Jesus. Then he says number two is they can never turn back.

Again that ties in with what we have in verse six. He who has begun a good work will bring it to completion. They can never turn back.

[29:07] And then the third thing he says is this they no longer have plans of their own. How many of us have been living our lives making all our own plans thinking we've got it all sorted out.

This is what we're going to do and when but the Lord reminds us that's not how it works. Now we have to come to the point where we just submit ourselves into the will of God so it's no longer our plans that matter but the plans that God has for us and to do his will remembering how he fulfilled the will of the Father not my will but yours be done he said.

So these three marks they are facing only one direction they can never turn back and they no longer have plans of their own.

As we prepare our hearts as we look at this letter of Paul to the Philippians it's a very personal it's a very intimate letter but it's not just for them it's God's word to you and to me as well to help us prepare our hearts to give us a sense of thankfulness to give us a sense of confidence in him and to give us that desire to grow in our knowledge and love of him and one another.

So may the Lord help us prepare our hearts and fill us with thankfulness and praise and it all be to his glory.

[31:01] we're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 13