

Christians in Unexpected Places

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Now then, we're going to begin our worship this evening singing in Psalm 108. Psalm 108, and that's from the Sing Psalms version, page 146.

We sing to a tune, High for Doll, verses 1 to 7. O Lord God, my heart is steadfast, and with all my soul I'll sing.

Harp and lyre I will awaken, and my song the dawn will bring. Lord my God, among the nations I will ever give you praise. In the midst of all the peoples I will sing of you always.

Psalm 108, verses 1 to 7, the double verse 7, to God's praise. O Lord God, my heart is steadfast, and with all my soul I'll sing.

Harp and lyre I will awaken, and my song the dawn will bring.

[1 : 22] Lord my God, among the nations I will ever give you praise.

In the midst of all the peoples I will sing of you always.

For your steadfast love is boundless, greater than the heavens high.

And your faithfulness towards us reaches even to the sky.

Far above the highest heavens, be exalted, O my God.

[2 : 50] And your glory spread abroad.

With your right and safe and helpless, rescue all those whom you love.

God has spoken from this temple, from this holy place above.

I will distribute in triumph every part of Sheffersland.

And the whole of Sarkovalli, I will measure with my hand.

[4 : 20] Let's call upon the Lord again in prayer. Let's pray together. Our gracious and eternal God, as we bow our heads before you in prayer, we give thanks again for these words that you have given us to sing, where the psalmist, in expressing his desire that the glory of the Lord would spread abroad throughout the earth, received that answer from God that you would indeed come to spread forth your blessing so as to cover these lands that are named in this psalm.

We thank you, Lord, that your glory has been made manifest and has largely gone through all the earth, though we know that parts of the earth, even tonight, have not yet been reached with the gospel.

O Lord, we thank you that in the spread of the gospel, your own kingdom has been advanced. And we thank you that your promise from the days of the Old Testament prophets through into the New Testament and the apostles, that your promise that you would build your church has indeed been, is indeed being fulfilled and has come to be seen in the way in which you bring people to know yourself.

We thank you tonight that we form part of those who have been reached with the gospel, those who have come to know that the Lord has provided salvation for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, we thank you tonight for him. It is indeed our great desire that we would know his blessing, that we would find as he sits upon the throne of the universe and administers his kingdom.

[6 : 05] Lord, our God, we pray that tonight we will know through the Holy Spirit of your blessing upon us. We pray that we may rejoice in being incorporated into your kingdom and that we may rejoice as a congregation, that we have the gospel, that we have that announcement in its fullness in your word, that the Lord God reigns on high and that the Lord God has provided for sinners like we are such an abundant redemption.

Lord, we thank you tonight that we can come to express these things before you in prayer. We thank you that you are the God who hears the crying of your people.

We thank you that you call upon us to call upon you. We thank you, Lord, that you make clear in your word that it is your delight to meet with us as we worship you and as we call upon you in prayer and sing your praises.

Help us, we pray, as we come to your word, both in the reading and expounding of it and in hearing its message. Help us to receive it once again into our hearts.

Help us to receive it in a way that would change and bring about in our lives that spiritual and holy shape that would be in accordance with your word on each and every facet of our lives.

[7 : 28] O Lord God, we pray tonight that our concern will be to be furthered in holiness of life, in commitment and love to you and to your cause and in looking to each other and to your cause at large so that we may value and love hearing about your people elsewhere throughout the world as we have been in recent times.

We pray tonight for your people in all parts of the world. Lord, we ask, Lord, that you'd bless again those who are persecuted, those who are facing so many difficulties that we know largely little about.

We thank you for the information that reaches us and for the way that we can bring this before you in prayer. Once again, we pray for the troubled spots of the world, the nations that are in upheaval through war, through famine, through various things that cause people distress, through misgovernment and mismanagement.

Lord, we ask that you would be merciful to the many millions of people in the world who have to go without so many of the things that we enjoy in abundance. Lord, we pray that you would bless them tonight and bless them especially with the gospel.

Forgive us, Lord, for we find ourselves complaining in relation to how we find things in these recent times with an increase in the price of commodities, with other aspects of increased prices and in fuel.

[9 : 05] While, O Lord, we do look with concern at these things, yet we confess they are but so small compared to the distress faced by many people in the world who don't even have clean water to use day by day, who have to walk miles for the nearest resources, who don't have shops to attend, and who have so few, O Lord, of the food and the commodities that we enjoy.

We ask that you would make us thankful, make us dependable, give us, we pray, not to be complainers, and help us not to be like your people Israel of old who as soon as they came to the place where there was little water grumbled against Moses and therefore grumbled against the Lord.

Help us, Lord, to be careful that we never grumble against you, that we never consider you as one to be complained of, for you give us day by day far more than we deserve.

And we do pray that you would continue to expand our thankfulness so that the praise and the glory will belong to you. Remember us, we pray, as a congregation of your people.

Lord, we thank you for all that we experienced this morning, for the baptisms that took place, for the children that were baptized and their parents, and we pray for them.

[10 : 27] We pray that you would bless them and bless this event to them. Make it indeed to them, O Lord, a means of blessing. We pray for every young family belonging to us as a congregation with children and bringing them up in difficult times as we face, O Lord.

Give them, we pray, to trust in yourself. Enable them to look to your word and give them confidence in your word as they would seek to bring up their children in ways that are acceptable to you and are bright and wholesome morally and spiritually.

We pray for them, Lord, in their schools. We ask that you would grant your blessing to all who teach our children. And we pray in the many challenges that they face, Lord, that you would grant your blessing to give them the strength and the resolve and the commitment and indeed the delight where possible in instructing young lives in such necessary subjects as they are.

O Lord God, we ask that your blessing will be upon our local authority as they too take charge of the material in our schools.

We pray that you would give them wisdom and courage and help them to resist whatever attempts are made, O Lord, to introduce that which is unwholesome, that which is contrary to the way in which your word sets before us, that which is healthy and good, spiritually and morally.

[12 : 01] And we pray that you would grant that blessing too throughout all our schools, throughout our nation, so that we may see many coming to be educated in a way that will be pleasing to you.

We ask your blessing too, Lord, tonight for all our older ones, for those who have come to a time of failing health. We remember them and ask that you would be near to them, be with them, Lord, as they face difficulties and challenges in regard to their mental capacity, regard to physical abilities and failures of various bodily faculties.

Gracious Lord, remember all who belong to us and have reached that stage of life. Remember, too, those who mourn over the passing of loved ones. Again, we pray for them.

We pray for those who have lost loved ones recently. We pray, too, for those who look back over years and still find it so traumatic and difficult to think of their loved ones no longer being here, whether they passed away in their young days as children or even infants or in their older years.

Nevertheless, Lord, we know the pain involved in losing loved ones. And even though we may know that our loved ones have gone to a better place, yet the pain of bereavement and separation remains.

[13 : 22] We thank you that you understand, that you know what it is, O Lord, to hear a cry from the cross. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And we ask, O Lord, that all our concerns and all our weepings, all our sorrows and all our changes may be laid at the foot of your cross and that we may see it in relation to your triumphant resurrection from the dead through which you have gone to prepare a place for your people.

And now we pray that you'd bless the children this evening, the young ones at their big YF. Bless, we pray, those who are in leadership there as well. We pray for Gordon MacLeod and his role within the presbytery.

We ask your blessing for him and for the work that he carries out and we ask that he may know your blessing from week to week as he engages with the young folks. And we pray that you would graciously hear us as we now continue in your presence.

All of these things we ask, seeking the pardon of our sin and cleansing in the name of Christ, our Lord, for his sake. Amen. Let's read from God's Word now from 1 Corinthians.

[14 : 34] 1 Corinthians chapter 16. And we read from the beginning through to the end of the chapter. Isn't it very instructive how the apostle, having gone through that amazing discourse in chapter 15 in such theological depth about the resurrection, that he could come at the beginning of this section, the final section of 1 Corinthians, to turn from that deep theology into something so practical as collection for the saints.

But he has no embarrassment about that because he realizes that all theology flows into our practical concern for one another and for the cause of God.

Now, concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper so that there will be no collecting when I come.

And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter so that you may help me on my journey wherever I go.

[16 : 09] For I do not want you, I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost for a wide door for effective work has opened to me and there are many adversaries.

When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you for he is doing the work of the Lord as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace that he may return to me for I am expecting him with the brothers.

Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong, let all that you do be done in love. Now I urge you, brothers, you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Nehaya and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.

Be subject to such as these and to every fellow worker and laborer. I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Nehaya because they have made up for your absence for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours.

[17 : 31] Give recognition to such men. The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prissa together with the church in their house send you hearty greetings in the Lord.

All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.

Our Lord, come, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus.

Amen. And we pray once again for God to follow that reading with his blessing. Our next psalm of praise is Psalm 122.

Psalm 122 in the Scottish Psalter. That's page 416. We'll sing the whole psalm. The tune is St. Paul. I joyed when to the house of God go up, they said to me.

[18 : 32] Jerusalem within thy gates our feet shall standing be. Jerusalem as a city is compactly built together and to that place the tribes go up. The tribes of God go thither.

Psalm 122 singing the whole psalm to God's praise. I joyed when to the house of God go up they said to me Jerusalem within thy gates our feet shall stand in be.

Jerusalem lost our city is compactly built together unto the place the place that rights go up the rights of God go there to Israel's testimony there to cause him thanks to pay for God got to praise the unity pierced và gi Hera n in ■■ che

Felicity Let them Thou love Beyond thy peace Have still Prosperity Therefore I wish That peace may still Within Thy walls Remain And never May thy Policies Prosperity Retain Now For my Friends and brethren's sake

Peace Be in thee I'll stay And For the house Of God Our Lord I'll see thy good always God Great Now will you turn with me to Paul's letter to the Philippians.

[22 : 12] Paul's letter to the Philippians where we're going to finish off our series of studies in Philippians with the final few verses there of chapter 4. Philippians 4 at verse 21.

Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

So we're coming to this final study as we've gone through the book of Philippians. We began it, I think, sometime back in June last year. And so it's taken us some time. But I did want, as I said at the beginning, to take time going through it so as to actually seek to bring out much of the main teaching in this wonderful letter of Paul.

And I think I said at the beginning that one of the reasons we do, or one of the main reasons we do such studies as these consecutively, going through a book like this, is so that we can actually take it as a whole.

Just imagine yourselves, if you were receiving this letter, if you were the congregation in Philippi, you wouldn't just pick out a passage here and there. You would begin at the beginning and read through the letter as a whole, and you would see how it was put together.

[23 : 37] And it's a wonderful thing to study these letters of the apostle, as well as other parts of scripture too, of course, and see how wonderfully and carefully the Holy Spirit has guided Paul in putting together these four chapters.

And we've seen how much there is packed into certain passages or even verses of this epistle. And it's great to see how that network of teaching, that wonderful tapestry, if you like, of teaching, has been woven together in such a way as when we bring out the various parts of it, you begin to see the whole pattern more clearly.

And I hope that's something that you've seen as we've gone through the epistle. Well, these final verses of the letter speak about two things mainly. First of all, it speaks about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He says, The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. And we'll take that first of all, and then come back to the other two verses, which speak mainly about the saints in Christ Jesus, the people of God that are called saints because of the way God has set them apart to be his own people in the world.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, you recall at the very beginning of the letter that he begins with a reference to the grace of God, chapter 1, verse 2.

[25 : 04] To all the saints in Christ Jesus, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. So he begins with a reference to grace and he ends with a reference to grace.

And within these two bookends, if you like, of grace, he has packed all the teaching that we've seen as we've gone through the letter. The grace of God is, of course, the undeserved favor of God that he bestows on us sinners.

It's not just favor, it's the undeserved favor of God. If you look at it in other terms, it's really effectively the love of God at work towards his people.

That grace of God, that undeserved favor, that love of God with which they are loved as it is worked through in their lives from day to day and year to year.

And you'll notice he's saying the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Be with your spirit. Now, he's still talking in plural terms, but obviously every individual is incorporated, included in the reference.

[26 : 13] The grace of the Lord Jesus be with your spirit, plural. You as a congregation. And that reminds us that this undeserved favor of God, this wonderful favor, this love of God for his people, is a love that reaches through into the deepest part of our lives.

It's designed to do that. It's something that actually comes to reach into the deepest recesses of our souls because we need the grace of God at work there. Because the grace of God brings the power of God.

The grace of God at work, the power of the love of Christ as that flows into the lives of his people. It's a life-changing love. It's a life-changing grace. It's a life-changing power.

And so, as he says here, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. It's a reminder to ourselves that this is really where we need the grace of God at work.

Not just to tidy up a few pieces in our lives, a few parts of our outward conduct as it might be, though that itself would not be a bad thing. But the grace of God in its effectiveness, in its work, is not just doing a tidying-up job, a sweeping-up job, so that certain aspects of your outward conduct are tidied up or cleaned up.

[27 : 32] It's actually something that reaches into such deep parts of your soul as involve your will, your emotions, your conscience.

All of that is affected by the working of God's grace as he applies it. There may be many things we know that stir our souls.

I'm sure most of you like some types of music or other. And people will say that their favorite type of music, if they have time to listen to it, really find it stirring.

They find it stirs their soul. And that's perfectly, perfectly acceptable, of course. When music or something that you love in that way stirs your soul properly, stirs your emotions, really works in you to move you to affection, to move you to appreciate what you're actually listening to.

It's a wonderful thing. But the grace of God is the only thing that can renew your soul. You can enjoy the most magnificent music.

[28 : 38] You can enjoy the most magnificent writing. You can enjoy all of those things that we have from God and his goodness. But the grace of God reaches deeply into your spirit.

And the grace of God, the working through of the love of God in the hearts of his people, is what really brings the change. And what I thought I would do with this point is just to try and summarize the teaching of the letter by thinking of it as the grace of God.

Because that's really, I think, one of the reasons that Paul has put these two bookends of grace where they are at the beginning and at the end. So that everything in between them, really, you might say, has some relation or other to this grace of God.

To this undeserved favor of God. To the love of God working in and towards his people. You remember back in chapter 1. It's the grace of God that binds us into a fellowship of people.

So that it brings about a partnership in the gospel. And he's thanking God for that. In chapter 1 there from verse 3. I thank my God for that fellowship. For that partnership.

[29 : 43] And as he goes on to speak of that. He speaks of them being all partakers with me of grace. That's what's made them a people.

That's what's made them the congregation, the church they are. They've been bound together. They're united together. They are a people by the grace of God. Then you go to the verse 12 of chapter 1.

I want you to know, brothers, what has happened to me has really helped to advance the gospel. Here is a man who's in prison, as we recall. Here's a man who's writing from prison to these beloved Philippians.

Here's a man who has all these troubles to contend with. Not just in regard to where he himself is. But the burdens he carries for all the churches. And yet he's convinced that the grace of God, the power of God's grace, makes these troubles work for the good of the gospel.

I want you to understand, he's saying, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. So it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard.

[30 : 47] We'll come back to that in a moment. It makes the troubles that we have work for the gospel and for our own good, as well as we depend on God. It enables us also to look beyond the present life.

Verse 19, and the present circumstances. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance.

And of course, it's the grace of God that has provided this wonderful Savior that he deals with so wonderfully in chapter 2, where he talks about the Son of God coming, showing this mind towards lost sinners, that he gave himself to all that he suffered, gave himself to the deprivations that he subjected himself to so willingly, and ultimately to the death of the cross itself.

It's that grace of God that has provided us with that Savior tonight, who is Jesus. Why has Jesus Christ existed? Why did he live in this world?

Why did the Son of God come? Because the grace of God was at work in providing that Savior for us. Grace of God, the love of God for his people, for his children, sent his own Son into this world.

[32 : 09] And then, the grace of God empowers our persevering witness. Chapter 2, verse 12, following. It's the persevering witness of God's people against the odds, you might say, against the troubles and the afflictions and the persecutions and the challenges and the resistance that they face.

And indeed, that itself is proof of Christ risen from the dead. And just imagine, just now, these disciples, that you find, the account you find in the book of Acts about the disciples, and they're going out into the world with the gospel.

In chapter 5, just to take one example, verses 40 to 42, you find the governing authorities summoning the disciples again and saying to them, don't preach in this name again, and wanting to send them away, and charging them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then let them go.

But they actually let them go, but they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name, for the name of Christ.

And every day in the temple, from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Now, can you possibly imagine these people, these disciples, if they were convinced that Jesus was still dead, as we're actually facing that idea in the world that Christ couldn't possibly have risen from the dead, nobody rises from the dead, certainly not by their own power.

[33 : 54] Can you imagine these disciples going out to the world with this message of Jesus risen from the dead, if they were not themselves convinced that he had risen from the dead?

Where did they get the encouragement from? Where did they get this conviction from? Where did they get this desire? Where did they get this burden to bring this message of the gospel to the world of their day?

From the fact that they knew Jesus was risen. That's what the grace of God had brought about. They would not have put up with all the sufferings and persecutions that they endured, as described in the book of Acts, if they had any doubts that Jesus was alive or dead.

They wouldn't have put up with it. And it's in chapter 3. I'm just scanning through this quickly. It's just a reminder to us that this is what we've covered. This is the substance, really, of the teaching of the book as we skim over these.

Chapter 3, the grace of God is what changes a persecutor into a disciple. There is the apostle himself giving his testimony.

[35 : 00] There he is talking about how he used to have confidence in the flesh, his own ability, his own ability to please God by his own efforts, by the strenuous efforts of trying to keep God's law.

But he said, whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. And so on. And he goes on, of course, from that to, into that great teaching of how we come to be justified.

Where does our righteousness come from that we need in the presence of God? It's in Jesus himself. And by faith in Jesus, his righteousness becomes ours.

Now, you and I need that righteousness. righteousness. We're not born with it. It's not something that we produce ourselves. If you think of it as the Bible often does, as a garment that is worn spiritually, spiritual garment, well, that garment is not woven by any human craftsman.

[36 : 15] That garment has been produced by God through Jesus Christ and his work on the cross. and the righteousness that now exists in Christ for us, that's what the gospel offers to us.

And you could go on and see how in chapter 3, the grace of God sanctifies God's people for glory. Chapter 3, verses 12, following on from that.

That's the grace of God in chapter 4 that mends broken relationships, that we need to mend broken relationships. I entreat you, I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

And so on. He talks there about how they need to deal with whatever has separated them and caused the difference of opinion or the falling out between them.

It's the grace of God that's required in order to mend broken relationships. It's the grace of God that produces contentment of mind. Chapter 4, verse 12, I have learned in whatsoever state I am therein to be content.

[37 : 21] Why is he content? Because he has Jesus in his fullness and he doesn't need to look for contentment anywhere else. He has all he needs of contentment in Christ.

It's the grace of God that moves people to kindness and supplies all our wants as we saw in our most recent study. Now all of these things are features which we need as a congregation.

All of these things whether we think of Jesus himself of being a fellowship and a partnership of actually having the strength to face our troubles in life of actually looking beyond the present life positively and in hope of sanctifying us for glory of mending broken relationships when that occurs of producing contentment of mind of moving us to acts of kindness to one another and to the world around us of supplying all our wants all our needs that is the grace of God as it works as it comes into our experience and into our lives.

So there is what Paul begins with or rather ends with although we've said it as the first point of our study tonight the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

What is it that moves you most in your own life? What is it that gives you the greatest satisfaction? What is it that gives you the greatest stirring of soul?

[38 : 57] Is it not the grace of God at work? Is it not the love of Christ as you experience it? Is it not Jesus being your Savior too?

Is that not the most precious thing you have? The most precious person that you own and are related to? This Lord this Savior this mighty Redeemer the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

But then he speaks also about the saints. And there are three things here briefly that we can take note of as he says first of all greet every saint in Christ Jesus.

All the saints greet you especially those of Caesar's household. Now you notice he's saying all the saints greet you. And the first thing that comes across to you from that is the unity of God's church.

The unity of all who are believers in Christ. This is what he's saying. All the saints greet you. All the saints are not in Philippi. All the saints are not in Rome.

[40 : 05] All the saints are scattered throughout the empire as Paul writes these words to the Philippians. But he says all the saints greet you. Maybe he meant all those particularly as he says of Caesar's household.

He does go on to mention that and we'll see that in a minute. But he does say all the saints greet you. And there is no indication that he wants to confine it to those that he knows himself personally or in Rome where he's imprisoned.

All the saints greet you. God has only one church. Whatever denominations we know of or may belong to all who are saints all who are set apart by God in Christ Jesus belong to each other as they belong to him.

So wherever God's people are placed they are spiritually connected in a brotherly sisterly way with all the saints elsewhere in the world.

And we have an interest because there is just the one church that crosses all of the divides that we know between congregations between denominations between various traditions in the gospel throughout the world we have an interest and involvement in the well-being of God's church.

[41 : 27] Why should it bother us tonight that Christians are actually suffering in different parts of the world because they are brothers and sisters in Christ because they belong to a family? Why should it bother us if certain congregations or certain groups that follow the Christian faith actually go aside into heresy and are no longer following the gospel faithfully maybe come sometimes up with some outrageous conclusions and practices?

Why should it bother us if some Christian churches mainstream Christian churches are embracing a worldly view of life and of marriage and of relationships? Why should that bother us?

Because because the saints of Jesus Christ make up one church and wherever you find decline whatever denomination it may be or whatever congregation it may be just as you can say within one congregation whatever individual it may be it concerns it concerns us as those who in this world are set apart to be God's people because the saints all the saints have an interest together in the well-being of Christ's church it is our concern it is our concern tonight for our brothers and sisters in Ukraine wherever else they may be in the world their welfare is important to us not because they're just human beings like ourselves but because as Christians in Ukraine they are the

Lord's people they differ from us as other Christians in other places do they don't worship exactly the same as we do they may have traditions that we don't ourselves agree with but where they present themselves as living by faith in Christ and seeking to be obedient to God then the Arab brothers and sisters at that level at least in the Lord all the saints greet you but especially those of Caesar's household this is interesting and it ties up with what we saw near the beginning we reflected on just briefly tonight as well in chapter 1 I want you to know brothers that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ and it led to some actually being emboldened to preach the gospel what do you see what he's saying there and what he's saying here all the saints greet you especially those of Caesar's household what is he talking about what is Caesar's household

Caesar's household is the imperial palace who was the Caesar at the time that Paul wrote to the Philippians it was the cruel emperor Nero and yet here you find in Nero's palace among Nero's servants among those who served as wicked emperor this un-Christian un-godly pagan man here you find Paul saying all the saints greet you especially those of Caesar's household there are saints in the most unexpected places even Caesar's household even Nero's household even Nero's servants contain saints there are Christians there there are people there who love the Lord and Paul is saying they are sending you their greetings tonight there are Christians in the most unexpected places places that are closed officially to the gospel there are Christians tonight as you know yourselves in China there are Christians tonight in North

[45 : 23] Korea these countries can be sealed off by their dictators as North Korea is at the moment and yet God has his people there you see we can we can legislate even in our own country against grace we can legislate in a way that seeks to wipe the statute book of all that is really specifically Christian we can imprison Christians we can make it really tough for them as it was for the apostle here but you cannot stop the gospel you cannot stop the Holy Spirit there is no power in the world or out of the world that can actually stand against the Holy Spirit and say you can't come in here this is a no-go area for the gospel we don't want your Christianity here here are all of these people in Caesar's household and they're worshippers of

God they are saints of God be thrilled about that tonight remember us you pray tonight for God's people throughout the world pray for those who are Christians in unexpected places pray for those who are Christians in countries that are closed officially to the gospel and that's what you find even the likes of Ukraine as well with all the brutality that the Ukrainian people are experiencing and have experienced now for months not even all that brutality can extinguish the gospel or can extinguish faithful witness to Christ how many people have you heard in the news reports quite a number thankfully that were interviewed certainly in the early parts of the struggles and asking for their views making reference to their faith in God making reference to placing their lives in his hand even as they fled the country or look to the shell of their accommodation a wreckage of their city did that destroy their faith did that mean that

Christianity had been wiped out of course not because you cannot stop the power of God the grace of God you cannot stop the love of God reaching sinners wherever he chooses you know there are people in our own locality tonight who are undoubtedly enemies of the gospel who make it quite clear that they are out against the gospel to do everything possible not only to make it ineffective but to get rid of it altogether if possible they stand as enemies of the church as enemies of the preaching of the gospel as enemies of the standard of the gospel the moral and spiritual standard that the gospel sets out and they make it clear many of them by the way they speak that that is what their life is driven by that is what they are setting out to achieve let me tell you this they may put us in prison we may end up having to suffer deeply for the faith for all we know they may remove everything from us in terms of our possessions but they cannot take

Christ from us they cannot take the gospel itself from us and remember when you're praying tonight again not just praying for those in these countries where you might not expect to find Christians but where they're there remember too for those who are about enemies of the gospel pray for them pray for this mighty grace of God to take hold of their lives as that grace of God took hold of the life of this author of Philippians who as he says in chapter 7 this power this Jesus grasped me he took hold of me he arrested me and he took me into the custody of his grace the power and the care of his grace pray for those tonight that God would convert them that the power of his grace would enter their lives that they may have a change around in their thinking completely not just so that we might have more peace for the gospel that's important but that they will realize themselves how much they need this Christ how valuable the Savior is how indispensable it is to have

Jesus as your Savior especially they who are of Caesar's household there are saints even there and there are saints tonight in the most unexpected places and finally he says greet every saint greet every saint in Christ Jesus he's been thinking up to now and writing in corporate terms plurals but now he's individualizing greet every saint in Christ Jesus we tend to categorize people don't we we tend to categorize Christians as well we tend to categorize Christians who are like ourselves have the same way of looking at things the same kind of worship and we categorize them and we make them really so much more important to us in a sense than others are we think of them as brothers and sisters but don't really want to go outside of that too much greet every saint in Christ

[51 : 26] Jesus wherever you come across a Christian someone who is truly the Lord's someone who truly loves the Lord someone who obviously is a saint set apart by the grace of God greet them and greet them means deal with them as brothers and sisters should greet every saint in Christ Jesus because the Bible tells us that we are all one in Christ Jesus in Paul's letter to the Galatians now he meant that specifically in terms of how we come to be justified by faith in Christ Jesus and we are made all one in that sense you mustn't take from that some ideas that you find current that there's no distinction at all between men and women in church or in church office or that sort of thing that's not what Paul meant he meant on the level of being justified of being accepted with God of being righteous of being saints there is no difference between male and female in that regard and we mustn't actually put a difference or something where of a distinction where God hasn't made one whatever race or color people may be of there is no racism allowed within the relationships of God's people greet every saint in Christ

Jesus the Bible teaches us the New Testament a biblical equality where we all have an equality in Christ where each of us is accepted by God as much as the other and you remember Paul himself when he wrote that little letter to Philemon you remember that he speaks in Philemon of how Philemon was to receive the slave that had run away from him and was now coming back to him this slave Onesimus I Paul am now an old man prisoner for Christ Jesus I appeal to you for my child Onesimus whose father I became in my imprisonment of course he's talking spiritually Onesimus was converted as he met with Paul as a prisoner he was converted formerly he was useless to you but now he is indeed useful to you and to me

I am sending him back to you sending my very heart I would have been glad to keep him with me in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel but I prefer to do nothing without your consent I have sent him back for you so no longer treat him as a slave but more than a slave as a beloved brother especially to me but how much more to you receive him as you would receive me aren't these incredible words here's here's here's here's this mighty apostle here's this great man of God and he's writing to Philemon in regard to this slave and here he is talking about this slave and saying to Philemon look I'm sending him back to you but he's a changed man he's been converted he's now a man of God receive him as you would receive me because in

Jesus Christ there's no distinction he's as acceptable to God as the apostle Paul was so that's why he's saying greet every saint in Christ Jesus well I hope that you have heard the voice of God speaking to you through these studies and indeed through all the studies of scripture that we engage in and you remember the words of Psalm 95 and verse 8 which speaks about the voice of God and today if you hear his voice harden not your heart this is to me and this is to you as well if you hear his voice today harden not your heart you know today is all you have yes you may see tomorrow but it's not guaranteed so for the moment today is all you have this today where you're hearing and when you're hearing the voice of

God today if you hear his voice don't harden your heart don't say I listen to it more tomorrow accept him now don't harden your heart against it don't promise yourself something that may never happen and today it's not just all you have but today is all you need today is all you need to have Christ for yourself to be saved to be a saint to come to be a follower a disciple of Jesus today is all you need even if there isn't a tomorrow for you or for me remember today right now is all you need to trust in Jesus don't say if you hear his voice as you're hearing his voice in the gospel now don't say well

[57:11] I'm not ready yet for this I need to do a bit more studying I need to do something else in order to actually appreciate more of what the gospel is I want to understand more of the likes of these letters of the Bible these books of the Bible today is all you need to trust in Christ to give your life over to him to follow him to be among the saints of God saints in unexpected places saints you can turn that around and say that there are people who aren't saints in places where you would expect them to be so and this is one of them you would not expect that this place which knows the gospel so well would have people who are not yet saints of God who have not come to a saving relationship with Jesus oh don't be like that if you're like that tonight

I urge you in the name of Christ trust in him receive him accept him love him follow him believe in him speak about him defend him do everything in your power to be a saint of God let's pray Lord our gracious God we thank you for the grace that makes saints out of sinners and as we find ourselves Lord still in the confession of our sins even as saints of God we pray for your grace for the grace of forgiveness for the grace of restoration we pray for your grace oh Lord for perseverance and we ask that your grace will be with us day by day in all our responsibilities to our families to our neighbors to our work colleagues to our fellow Christians grant your grace to us

Lord we pray as we meet with the world in its hostility to the gospel grant us grace to treat them as we know you would treat them grace to be tactful and patient and grace to depend Lord that you would bless us and do for us even more than we are able to ask or even think hear us we pray for Jesus sake Amen well we're singing in conclusion tonight from Psalm 133 Psalm 133 and the Sing Psalms version of it and we're singing to tune Bishop Thorpe page 175 how excellent a thing it is how pleasant and how good when brothers dwell in unity and live as brothers should Psalm 133 you'll find that on page 175 how excellent a thing it is excellent a thing it is how for blessed and blessed and her good when brothers dwell in unity and live as brothers should for for it is like the precious soil for doubt own male said

The Lord bestows his blessing there, The life that never ends.

I'll go to the door here to my right this evening. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always.

[62 : 29] Amen. Amen.