

A Goodbye We Won't Easily Forget

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Preacher: Walt Alexander

[0 : 0 0] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! The brothers who are with me greet you.

All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. Verse 23, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

I recently read an article that began one of the saddest books of the modern world is Mark Bittman's How to Cook Everything.

Now, not because the plot this guy writes, not because the plot is heartbreaking. It's a cookbook. You hope it delivers happiness, not sadness. Or because it documents the ravages of worldwide hunger, which is heartbreaking and heart-wrenching.

[1 : 2 0] What's sad, he writes, is that we need it. It's a cookbook for a society that has forgotten how to cook. And my wife owns several Mark Bittman cookbooks, and so I was immediately intrigued by this article and kept on reading.

He goes on to say, in former cookbooks, many things were assumed. How to use a knife. What a sifter is. Now, I'm not so sure what a sifter is.

But many things are assumed, he said. How to use a knife. What a sifter is. What appliances are in a kitchen. But in Bittman's cookbook, in this cookbook, nothing is assumed.

Bittman tells you how to do everything. He tells you how to boil water. Now, if you need some help with that, I'll be available after the meeting.

Can help you out. You know, he tells you how to crack and whisk eggs. How to slice with a knife. I don't know how many, you know, you just pick up a knife and slice it, you know, but he breaks it down.

[2 : 2 6] Each step in his cookbook is described in careful detail. This author continues to write, How to Cook Everything is a cookbook for a society who's forgotten how to cook, whose devotion to progress and technology has brought us to the point where someone has to teach us how to boil water.

As we continue this morning and study these final verses of Philippians, I'm most burdened that we not forget what we've seen, what we've heard.

This morning will be the 20th sermon in our church's little life that we've heard from this precious book. And the only thing worse than not studying Philippians would be forgetting Philippians.

And as I was diving in and thinking about this subject, thinking about our theme for this book, All of Christ is for all of life. As I was studying this morning, I was tempted to kind of go through the whole book and develop this theme and just say it again one more time.

But I'm going to resist that temptation because we don't have enough time for all that. But tucked into these parting words, which would take less than 30 seconds to read slowly, are precious windows into Paul's life and how he's taken all of Christ to himself.

[3 : 53] And I trust that in so doing, in studying these words, we'll not only see his life, we'll see a path to walk and a path to never forget that all of Christ, is for all of life.

That all of Christ, all of who he is in his life, death, and resurrection is not for one day, maybe in eternity, but for right now. For a life lived in the fullness of the Spirit and in the fullness of joy.

So we're going to dive into these final greetings. And I trust unpack this theme. Again, point one is community is not an optional add-on, but a vital necessity for a Christian life.

Community is not an optional add-on, but a vital necessity for a Christian life. You know, there's a few things people want to talk about more right now in our society than community.

The word is literally everywhere if you're keyed up to it. Community gardens, community parks, farm-to-table community restaurants, community builders, community coffee shops.

[5 : 02] Everybody's talking about community. And we need another community coffee shop in this town. And yet, beneath all our experience of community, there seems to be little real experience of it.

Beneath all our talk of community, there seems to be little real experience of it. One author recently wrote, one of our congressmen said, what's wrong with America starts with one uncomfortable word, loneliness.

But beneath all this clamor of community, he says, what's wrong is loneliness. It's seen in the continued rise of suicide.

The continued rise of drug-related death, both now surpassing automotive accident, which was the number one killer for decades.

It's seen in the continued decline of deep friendship. I remember about a year ago, I read an article from a study from Duke that said that people reported that they discussed important matters.

[6 : 10] And they discussed important matters with only a few people. And they said that that average had dropped in 20 years from three people to two.

Now, at first, I was like, three to two? I mean, what's the big deal? But if you think about it, in 20 years, people are saying they talked to people about the real things of their life to half of the number of people they do now.

Many reasons have been offered for this epidemic of loneliness. Perhaps it's the decline of many small towns and industries that have moved out and left people without work and alone.

Perhaps it's the rise of social media, which everybody seems to be talking about, or the ever-changing workplace that has people with work, but far from home and far from the people they know.

Perhaps it's our love of freedom. Perhaps it's our unwillingness to maintain the day-to-day commitments that form strong social ties. Perhaps it's just technology that leaves us often alone, or if not alone, alone together.

[7 : 10] I saw one ad on Twitter that I just thought was totally great for how forward this was. You know, this is HBO. I don't know anything about this show, but it said, Should you go out?

Listen to your inner Kelly. Stay home with your friends. And by friends, we mean our shows. I like the little Cosby family, too. You ain't got no money.

But, you know, it's forward like that. Stay home with your friends. And by friends, we mean our shows. You know, whatever the cause, it's clear that we have less friends than ever, and it's literally killing us.

And yet, nearly hidden. And this little final greeting is the community we were created to enjoy.

Paul writes, Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. You know, as with most of the letters of the day, Paul concludes his letters with a final personal word from himself.

[8 : 18] A lot of scholars would argue these final words were often written by his hand, as he says in 2 Thessalonians. And nearly every time in these final words, he includes greeting to people there and greeting from people with him.

You know, in Romans 16, he mentions 26 people by name that he greets in Rome. And this greeting is quite similar to many of the others.

He says, Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. In many ways, he just ends where he began. He greeted us with grace and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ at the beginning of this letter as a saint in Christ Jesus.

You know, saint is a word that's been misused and been confused over hundreds of years in the church. It doesn't refer to a super spiritual Christian like Mary. And it doesn't refer to a super active Christian.

It doesn't merely refer to them like a super spiritual or a super active Christian. Like, man, that girl's a saint is the way we use it. Saint simply means someone who belongs to God.

[9 : 26] Someone who belongs to God. Its meaning comes from the Old Testament where God delivered his people. Remember, he delivered them through the Passover and through the Red Sea. And he said, These people, you are, Exodus 19, you are my treasured possession.

A kingdom of priests and a holy nation. To say we're saints in Christ Jesus is Paul's way of saying we belong completely to him. And nothing else matters about us.

I'm sure you've been to a restaurant where you've asked what the wait is. The wait is long, you know, 20, 30 minutes.

And yet you see tables out there empty. If you walked a little bit closer, they have that reserved sign on them. No matter what you do, no matter what you pay, you're not sitting down at those tables.

Or maybe you've been to a concert where the front row is reserved. I went to a performance the other night and the front row was reserved. And I couldn't get up in that row. And what Paul's saying in this text is similar to those things.

[10 : 32] He's saying your life is reserved for Jesus Christ. He set the reserve sign over your life. He owns it. You know, we're not our own. We were bought with a price.

What Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6. And that's what he's saying. You're reserved for Christ. You belong to him. And in belonging to him, the scriptures just say we are brought into this community.

We're a saint in Christ Jesus. And being in Christ means we're brought into this community. The scriptures talk about this in a number of different ways. He says you're one of his people. Once you were not a people, but now you're God's people.

That's the way Peter puts it. You're part of his body. The body has many members. Not all members are the same. And yet all of them are in the same body.

He says you're a member of his household. He said, you know, no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints. Members of the household of God is what he says. You're a member of his household.

[11 : 30] You're a living stone is what he says in 1 Peter 2. You're part of his spiritual house. He's building a new temple. One that does not have a zip code, but one that is with a people. And you're part of it.

You're a living stone. You're not dead. You're not made of things of this earth. You're made. You're born again by the Spirit. What's flesh is flesh.

What's spirit is spirit. What he's saying and what we need to hear is that community is not something firstly that we pursue or something we do. Community is firstly something we receive in Jesus Christ.

Something we receive by being members of his family. It's why all community outside of Christ fails finally to deliver. Strikingly, though, in this book, again and again, Paul unpacks what community means in real life.

You know, we belong to Christ. He says we partner in the gospel. He continues, we share with one another in grace.

[12 : 49] Verse 125, we strive for the progress and joy of one another. He exhorts us to stand firm in one spirit, literally one soul with one mind, striving side by side for the gospel.

He tells us in verse chapter 2 to count others more significant than ourselves. If this community is all about Christ and all about what we're brought into, then somebody else matters more than us.

We put one another first. We die to selfish ambition and rivalry. We seek the interests of others. We stand with one another. He says we're fellow soldiers. Fellow workers.

With workers is what that means. We agree with one another. What I love about this book is how it soars to amazing heights about who Christ is and who we are in him again and again.

It turns and calls us to live like Christ in the normal, everyday difficulties of friendship. Philippians is blunt about community life.

[13 : 49] I mean, the applications of Philippians would fit in a room of mature 50-year-olds or would fit in the room of immature preschoolers.

Because the problems of community are problems that shape us all. I recently read this book that said, Ed Welch said, I think we have it for you, relationships are the best and worst of life.

I just, I totally agree. The relationships stink sometimes. They're the best of life. They're the things you talk about. They're the things that strike you to the core and shape your life in so many ways.

And yet, they are the things that are worse. Nothing gets you lower. Nothing makes you feel lower than a snake's belly, than being betrayed or being slandered by a friend.

As Paul unpacks this, he wants us to press through the difficulties of community life. Because in Christ, we belong to one another.

[14 : 55] It's worth it. It's worth the fight. So he throws no bones about talking about disagreement, conflict, complaining, selfishness, pride, arguing, and much more.

Because he wants us to realize what it means to belong together. It's no surprise then that he ends this book saying, greet every saint.

The brothers who are with me, greet you. The saints that are here, greet you. Especially those of Caesar's house. What he's saying again and again is what we need to hear. That the Christian life is not a solo mission.

It's a community project that's often slow going. You know, home projects are so much easier since the advent of YouTube.

Can we all just amen that? I mean, you can search the most bizarre little things going on with your dishwasher or your brakes of your car or whatever it is. And somebody has searched that before and done a how-to video.

[15 : 56] It's totally great. But sometimes, if you're like me, not super smart, you get in literally over your head. In places where even YouTube cannot go.

And you got to reach out to friends. There are a few in this room I've reached out, perhaps a few too many times. But the Christian life is like that.

It's a house project that we can't do alone. So do we ask for help?

I don't know. I feel like Paul would want to say that to us again. Do we ask for help? You often, sometimes in church, or many times often in church, we can kind of put our best, not merely foot, but best face forward.

And if community life is hard, it's okay to admit it's hard. It's okay to be honest about our gripping fears of the future, our nagging doubts, our aching regrets.

[17 : 03] Do we seek counsel? You have a friend that just seeks counsel all the time. And it's just so, it's such a provoking example. But do we give help too?

Do we seek our own interests? Do we prioritize the needs of others? Community is not an optional add-on, but a vital necessity for a Christian life.

Paul compellingly invites us back to what we already know is true in that greeting. Point two, mission is not a weekend option, but an all-encompassing priority for a Christian life.

Mission is not a weekend option, but an all-encompassing priority for a Christian life. You know, Paul continues his greeting and includes greeting from a surprising group of people that I'm sure may have stuck out to you.

You know, it's one of the only names that's in this greeting. In verse 22, he says, All the saints greet you, all the saints, especially those of Caesar's household.

[18 : 17] Now, that's a surprising group of people. That's a surprising name to be named favorably in the apostles' letter. I'm sure you remember Paul was arrested for preaching the gospel in Jerusalem.

Remember, he just kept heading to Jerusalem all throughout Acts. And everybody was telling him, Don't go to Jerusalem, that something's going to happen to you in Jerusalem. In fact, you're going to get tied up. You're going to be executed if you go to Jerusalem.

And so he gets to Jerusalem. And sure enough, they gang in on him. They try him. And when they attempt to execute him, he appeals to Rome. He appeals to Caesar. He goes all the way to Rome.

And as he sat in that prison, he continued to preach the gospel. And the gospel begins to infiltrate the greatest empire of the ancient world. It's incredible.

Paul's in house arrest or in prison in Rome, preaching the gospel and reaching most likely the slaves and the freedmen that worked in this Roman empire.

[19 : 17] I find this so fascinating. You know, at the very heart of power in the Roman empire, in the capital city, another kingdom was rising up. The future, if you know the future, after Paul's death is not pretty.

This Caesar was none other than Nero. And this Nero persecuted and killed numerous Christians. Nevertheless, what Paul is telling us, even before that happens, is that another kingdom is rising up and continuing to grow.

And we'll be here long after Rome crumbles. And what I love about this picture is the image of the apostle preaching peacefully in chains.

Now, if you're anything like me, I love to share the gospel with people that don't know the gospel. But I love to share the gospel when the conditions are perfect.

When I'm not in a hurry. Don't have groceries in my hand. When they seem receptive. But not the apostle.

[20 : 29] You know, underlying this conviction to preach the gospel in season and out of season is the conviction that he belongs to Jesus. And Jesus can use him however he sees fit. You know, if you remember in chapter 1 that we studied this, he said, My imprisonment is for Christ.

I still don't get that. My imprisonment is for Christ, he's saying from that Roman imprisonment. What he's saying is, I'll preach the gospel with joy, assuming that the Lord has placed me in chain instead of releasing me from chain according to his good, wise purpose.

So my imprisonment, where I am right now, is for Christ. And I'll leverage it for him. What do you do with somebody like that? You can't even chain him up.

You can't literally, but not his spirit. You know, he says in 2 Timothy 2, which we have for you, he says, Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, has preached to you in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains.

Same chains that he's writing in the letter to the Philippians with. Bound with chains. That's a criminal. But the word of God is not bound. I love that. You know, the word of God is not bound. He's sitting there. He continues to preach because the word of God is not bound, even though he is.

[21 : 44] And it will spread. And that's what it's done in this household. He continues in 1, chapter 1, verse 21, where he says, To live is Christ, and to die is gain. To live is Christ, to die is gain.

You know this, but what he's saying is, if I'm honest, I'd love to fly from these chains and to be with Christ. He continues, that's better by far. But nevertheless, he says, if I remain alive, my life is all about Christ.

What he's saying is, to live is Christ means, where I am is what he deems best and most helpful to the mission. And whatever he deems best, I will receive with joy.

To live is Christ, just his way of saying, I'm at his disposal. I mean, I don't have goals. I don't have successes.

I don't have incentives that matter to me apart from him. To live is Christ. Fittingly, Acts 28 concludes in this way.

[22 : 49] We have for you. He says he lived there two, these are literally last words of Acts. He lived there two whole years at his own expense. Remember us telling you they don't pay for you to be in prison.

Friends do. And he welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus with all boldness and without hindrance.

I love that. I recently began reading a book about the secret service. It's scratching that eight-year-old itch to know what's going on behind those dark sunglasses.

And one of the things that immediately struck me from the forward and into the first couple chapters is that their mission is simple and unique. Quite obviously, they protect the president and our nation's highest leaders different times.

But unlike other branches of the military and law enforcement, when shots are fired, they don't rush to neutralize the shooter.

[24 : 01] So much of our military, so much of our law enforcement, that is their responsibility. But when shots are fired, the secret service rushes to get big and protect the president.

They literally step into the line of fire. One of the things that stood out for me in one of these opening chapters is they were reviewing the newsreel when JFK was shot.

Walter Cronkite, which I've heard his name a lot, but never was alive to hear him on television. He reports that JFK had been shot.

And one of the things he said is that the secret service chased into the crowd to find the shooter. And the author of this book says, no, no, no, they didn't. No secret server, or no secret service man chases into the crowd.

They chase to the president. Their mission is simple. Their commitment to it is undeterred. I think you find a similar commitment in the apostle.

[25 : 12] There's so many things to care about. There's so many things that he could get caught up in. There's so many things fighting for his daily living or whatever he needed, but his mission and his commitment to his mission is undeterred no matter what.

Philippians would have us make our lives all about him. Sometimes I think we can read the apostle Paul, read Acts 24, 20, where he says, I don't count my life of any value nor as precious to myself.

Only I may finish my course and the ministry I've received and the Lord Jesus testified to the gospel of grace. We think that's just for the ministers. That's just for the religious people.

That's just for the leaders. But that's not the way Christianity talks. It's all of us are to live with this type of commitment to the mission. And it's not because God needs our help.

He's not looking for a hand. He doesn't need a hand. And it's not because he wants us to work hard to please him or something like that. It's because it's the most freeing and joy-filled life there is where we stop living for puny things and live for Jesus.

[26 : 19] So is the mission a weekend option for our time or is it something that invades every detail of our life? Does Christ claim it all?

We're only in 11 to 12 spot on Sunday morning. Now I know enough about you to know that's not true.

It's just I think this text and these things are just calling us and wooing us back out of lesser things to this. Where's the Lord placed you? Who are your friends?

Who are your coworkers? Who are your neighbors? Who are your family members? Why are you here? And not so many other places. Why are you here?

Scripture would say again and again you're here for Christ. What's the motto of our life? What's the banner? It must be Christ.

[27 : 25] It doesn't mean we'll be in full-time ministry before we die or that God's intention is that all of us be in full-time ministry far from it though that's not this sermon. I could preach that sermon.

It does mean a life is for Christ and Christ alone. Point three, grace is not merely forgiveness but all of Christ for a Christian's life.

Grace is not merely forgiveness but all of Christ for a Christian's life. I'm going to explain that but you know Philippians concludes with a benediction. A wonderful benediction.

You know many of Paul's letters conclude with a benediction promising grace and more than a few include this very phrase. Look in verse 23.

His words are incredible. He says, The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. This reference to grace takes us all the way back to the beginning to the opening greeting of the letter.

[28 : 32] He begins, Grace to you and he concludes here grace with you. Grace to you and then through my words and I'm about to preach to you I'm about to read to you but grace also be with you.

What does he mean by grace? You know grace is a word we use all the time in so many different ways. You know we speak about grace like it's a personality trait. We refer to someone as graceful.

Right? Someone elegant and refined like a ballerina on stage. Some of us have never heard graceful in reference to us. We're more like a bull in a china shop and a ballerina on her toes.

We refer to someone as gracious, right? What we mean by that is someone who's courteous and kind. Someone who's polite. Someone who, my mom taught me, holds the knife in the right hand and the fork in the left hand.

Who knows that little book of manners? Which I've never seen but supposedly exists somewhere. You know we often speak of grace though more often as a concept, an idea.

[29 : 49] You know we refer to someone as giving us grace like they're cutting us slack, like they're extending the grace period. So maybe your mortgage payment is due on the first of the month but the grace period continues to the 15th before it's actually due.

more often or most often we refer to grace as God's favor. Rightly so. And his love that never, ever, ever, ever, ever is based on what we do.

Yet, in this common benediction the apostle defines grace in a most staggering way. He says grace is not a characteristic. It's not ultimately a concept or an idea or a way of relating to people.

It's not even favor with God. Merely, grace is a person. Grace is Jesus Christ. That's what he's saying. Jesus Christ is grace.

John says, As the word became flesh and dwelt among us we've seen his glory full of grace and truth from his fullness we have received grace upon grace. You know, the law came through Moses but grace comes through Jesus Christ.

[31 : 02] What he's saying is he's bringing these things together. He could have ended the thing saying grace be with you or he could have ended the letter saying that Jesus Christ be with you but this most common benediction brings them two together because they mean the same thing.

If he says grace be with you he means Jesus Christ be with you. If he says Jesus Christ be with you he means grace be with you. So he says the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Now at first this distinction this emphasis appears to make little difference but at closer glance I think it makes all the difference in the world.

This means that in Jesus there is for us only grace. In Jesus there is for us only grace.

You know if grace were just a personality trait in God that most often or most of the time he is gracious or if grace was just some concept or idea that he tries to be gracious with us or even that it was just his favor or his kindness towards us to those who deserve his wrath we must assume that eventually grace would run out.

[32 : 21] We must assume that we would try his patience and exhaust his grace. We must assume just because of every other human relationship that we would frustrate and annoy him.

How could it not be? How could God not eventually say okay that's enough? you've used too much grace.

Would not he always be measuring the grace he gave us and waiting to see where was the line when we took too much? But what he's saying is that in giving us Jesus Christ the perfect son of God the Lord would have us rest assured that there is only an endless bottomless boundless grace for us because his grace is given to us not merely in a desire to be kind to us or in a personality trait towards his relation with us but his grace is given to us in a person his dear son who he crucified in our place so that we might never know anything else but grace.

John Owen who says it this way just blows me away. He says and this is a little heavy sled so we'll try to read it slow. He says if now there be grace enough for sinners and an all sufficient God it is in Christ and indeed in any other there cannot be enough.

This is the bottom of all peace confidence and consolation. On this ground it is as if all the world should set themselves to drink free grace mercy and pardon drawing water continually from the wells of salvation if they should set themselves to draw from one single promise an angel standing by and crying out drink oh friends drink abundantly take so much grace as shall be abundantly sufficient for the world of sin which is in every one of us they would not we would not be able to sink the grace of that promise one hair's breadth there is enough for millions of worlds if it were if it were because it flows to us from an infinite bottomless fountain what he's saying is in Jesus Christ there's only grace and that grace is bottomless because Jesus

[34 : 59] Christ is like a better way to say it this grace is as endless and bottomless and boundless as God is for us in Jesus Christ that's the fountain of all the grace it flows from the heart of God this is the one who's from everlasting to everlasting who had no beginning and so his gracious purposes never run out is what he's saying we can be assured that God is pleased with us that no punishment or wrath remains we can be assured that God has love for us and his commitment to do us good will never be stopped and slow because he's given us Jesus Christ he gave his son and if he gave him and gives us grace in him then that grace will never run out it reminds us though that outside of Jesus in the end there is only judgment I read from Hebrews 9 this morning that after death we will all be judged

John Calvin said the only thing that matters about us is whether we're in Christ because if we're not in Christ we don't receive any of the merits any of what he's done sad reality is often we can live thinking we are in Christ Jesus said not all those who say to me Lord Lord are mine not all those who prophesy in my name are mine not all those who attend church every Sunday morning are mine he says depart from me I never knew you so we must sure this up in this life so be prepared for the next that's what I offer to you today is the day of salvation salvation if you would come and bow your knee to Jesus that's what he says he'll change it grace alone will follow you all the days of your life this means that in Jesus there's only there is only for us grace it also means that in grace there is only for us

Jesus grace doesn't promise an easy life as Philippians attest doesn't promise us riches or worldly success but grace does promise us Jesus and because of grace he'll never leave it's so fitting that he concludes this the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit it simply means doesn't mean just with the inside of us or something like that it just simply means he's with you specifically he's with you he created you now he's joined himself to you by grace forever in communion with him grace comes to you right there right there where you are who you are all of Christ is for all of life and it's not generic it's specific Alec Montier concludes his commentary with these words and I thought it's fitting for us to conclude our series with these there is then no more fitting conclusion to Philippians than the simplicity of the final prayer for us as for himself

Paul wanted nothing but a daily and deepening experience of Jesus satisfying and unsearchable no bottom boundless the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit Father in heaven thank you for these few moments we humble ourselves before you Lord we long to know more and more of your grace we thank you for the assurance of these words and the promise that they hold out for us that there is no end in sight to grace Lord there are things in our mind about the future that we just don't know and nevertheless this promise rings out and is held out over the rest of our lives that the Lord Jesus Christ the gracious one will be with us forever we bow before you and worship you and we give to you our life to make much of Jesus we pray for the glory of God in Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message given by Walt

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