

Living As Gospel Citizens

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[0 : 01] Well, good morning. This morning we're going to start a new series in the book of Philippians. And I'm going to begin by talking a little bit about the city of Philippi.

It was founded in the 4th century BC and in the 1st century BC it became a Roman colony. In the middle of Macedonia, the Greek-speaking part of the world, it became an outpost for the Roman Empire in important ways.

It was named after Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. But when the Romans took over, they made it a Roman city in some very unique ways.

Legally, they were free from certain forms of taxation. The benefit of being a Roman colony was they were under Roman law rather than being under local law.

If you think through some of the tricky things that Jesus and the Pharisees and Sadducees had to navigate in Palestine, none of that was true because it was direct Roman law.

[1 : 02] And it was settled by many soldiers who were given land grants to own property after the fall of Julius Caesar and the shakeout in the Roman Empire.

It was a very Roman city. And of all the Greek temples and all the other forms of worship, the worship of the emperor of Rome was the greatest thing.

The temples that were there was the most prominent form of religion in Philippi in the 1st century. And it's to this city that Paul came during his second missionary journey.

You can read about it in Acts 16. He came and though there was no synagogue, so no major Jewish presence, he found a group of people who were God-fearers, probably Gentiles, who were within the Jewish circle who were worshipping and gathering for prayer.

And he came and he shared the good news of Jesus. We hear the conversion of Lydia as a part of that, a prominent woman in the city who hosted then the early church.

[2 : 16] But as Paul came, as happened in lots of places, he not only came and saw some response, but he also saw opposition. After healing a woman possessed by a demon, there was conflict.

And hear how strong the Roman theme is in this. They brought accusation against Paul in Acts 16.20. He said, these men are Jews. They're disturbing our city.

They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice. And the rest of the story, Paul was thrown into jail with his companions.

Then there was a grand earthquake. Paul and Silas were singing hymns. The jailers converted the famous interaction. The jailer says, sirs, what must I do to be saved?

And they said, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. And this is the foundation of the church in Philippi that probably happened about 12 or 13 years before this letter was written.

[3 : 20] This letter was written at the end of Paul's life. He was probably imprisoned in Rome. That seems to be the most likely thing about 62 A.D.

And he was writing to this church that he had seen founded so many years ago, writing to them as they faced the Roman culture that they lived in.

It was a place of great privilege. It was also a place of great pressure. Because conforming to this value that Rome is everything was very high.

Roman citizenship was a point of pride. Roman connection was a point of identity. including even their participation in the cult of the emperor.

And if they went along with this tide, if they followed along with this, being citizens of Rome and all that, they would have great privilege.

[4 : 18] But the Christians there and the churches found that following Christ would provoke persecution instead.

It would be costly for them. And they were facing pressures from without. They were facing fractures from within because of these tensions.

And so Paul writes the book of Philippians to this church in this Roman colony with this theme verse. Verse 127. Live a life worthy of Christ.

Standing firm in one spirit with one mind. Striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. Paul wrote this as a pastor to a church that he loves saying, Stand firm though the tide of the culture is flowing against you.

Stand firm. Be citizens of the new kingdom that you are a part of because of Christ. Count as more worthy than the most great privilege of being a citizen of a Rome.

[5 : 24] Count being a citizen of heaven your greatest privilege. And friends, this is partly why we think this is a really useful book for us to be studying today.

Because I don't know about you, but I feel and see that our church faces similar pressures today. We live in a world where there are strong pressures to be conformed to the world around us.

Our media culture, our political culture, the prevailing moral code and ethics of this world that we live in. They run contrary to a life faithful to Christ.

And we see this on both the right and the left. There are other visions of a better society. Other offers of an easier salvation. Other programs on how to live a better life.

And all of them are fueled by worldviews that do not know Christ. That do not heed God's word. And do not seek to honor and glorify God.

[6 : 32] And this pressure is on from both sides. And here in New Haven, we feel both of those things acutely. Friends, Paul is saying, reminding us, that the church should be neither left nor right.

But to be the citizens of heaven is to be something altogether different. And there will certainly be places where we will find agreement with one side or the other as they reflect kingdom values.

But we are never beholden to them. And we never become citizens of following these systems, these groups, these worldviews that our world is promoting.

We are called to love a world that we will constantly find we will need to nuance our response to. We will need to find ways to love without agreement.

We will need to find ways to serve without buying in. And Paul is writing this letter to a church to say, stand firm in the gospel.

[7 : 44] Hold on to the word of life in the midst of the pressures that you are facing. Be gospel citizens is what he's saying in this overall book.

And so we're going to start by looking at the first section, verses 1 through 11. That's at page 980 in the Pew Bible. If you want to look there with us, we're going to be looking at Philippians 1, 1 through 11.

We're going to be answering the question, what does a community of gospel citizens look like? So if you want to turn with me, we're going to read this passage together and then pray.

Philippians chapter 1. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy.

[8 : 52] 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.

It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may prove what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Let's ask for God's help as we listen to his word this morning. Lord, we pray that you would help us, Lord, to sit under your word, that our hearts, Lord, would be ready to hear and to heed what you have to say to us, that your Holy Spirit would be working in our hearts to convict us of ways that we have not followed your word.

Lord, I pray for minds to be alert, to listen and understand, and Lord, for hands and wills to be ready to obey. Lord, I pray for your help this morning, that you would help me to speak clearly, that you would help me to speak your word, truthfully and faithfully, for all of our good.

[10:24] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So in this section, and I'm going to focus on verses 3 through 11 as we look at it this morning, in this section we see three things about the characteristics of a gospel community.

A gospel community is thankful for gospel partnership, expressive of gospel love, and prayerful for gospel fruit. So if you're taking notes, there's your outline. First thing then, Paul says, is that a gospel community is thankful for gospel partnership.

This is what I see in verses 3 through 8. This idea of the gospel is central, not only here but throughout the book. What does he mean in the gospel? He uses it seven different times in this short book, and he never ever defines it.

Because by this time at the end of his life, in the Christian church, gospel was shorthand that everybody knew what it meant. It talks about the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ to accomplish for us our salvation, so that by faith in him we might be brought out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of alienation and into a life-giving relationship with God.

That's what the gospel is. And what Paul starts with is, I am so thankful for gospel partnership with you. What did this look like?

[11:51] Well, it looked like a couple of things. First of all, he remembers the story back that we talked about briefly, and you can read about in Acts 16, how they participated in the founding of the church, how Lydia hosted the home, how the jailer, after he was converted, took Paul and his companions into his home, and how we'll see in chapter 4, this church was regularly contributing to the ongoing ministry that Paul had.

Even as he moved on from Philippi to other churches, to Thessalonica and to Corinth and to Rome, the church at Philippi was continuing to financially support Paul's ministry.

So there was a partnership in that sense. Secondly, there was a partnership because they shared this commitment to live a life worthy of the gospel.

That phrase that we read in verses 127. Their partnership was not just in a mission, but in a shared belief system, in a shared world that they lived in.

Because of the gospel, we share together. We are partners in our faithfulness to believing and continuing to believe and live out in obedience our life according to the gospel.

[13:11] But thirdly, and also clearly from this, we see that they were participating in the proclamation of the gospel. Paul came and he was all about the gospel.

And they not only supported him by doing this, but they would actively share. Look at verse 7. This is partly where I see this. Paul writes, Not only was Paul doing this, explaining and defending the gospel, but so were the Philippians.

They were standing with him and doing the same thing in whatever context they lived in. They too were sharing this good news, defending and confirming. This is the best thing that you have ever heard.

Come and see who Jesus is. Come behold what God has done. And come believe. This was a mission of Paul.

This was a mission of the early church. And Paul was so thankful for this Philippian church that was a partner with them. And it was not an easy partnership. As we read in that verse, not only did they participate with him in the ministry, but they participated with him in the suffering.

[14:36] Paul writes to them later in chapter 1, For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Paul knows that this partnership was going to be costly for them. It would mean them identifying with Christ against the culture that they lived in and potentially facing the opposition and persecution that Paul faced as well.

So the first thing that Paul says about a gospel citizenship is that there is a gospel partnership. We are in this together. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God has called you to be a part of the church.

And the church is here on earth in this in-between time, between the ascension of Christ and his return to bring final judgment and the end of all things and the remaking of all things in a glorious

new world.

We have a mission that God has given us all to share in together, to make Jesus known. And that happens through our faithfulness, and it happens through our ministry to one another.

[15 : 55] For those of you who are new, and to remind those of you who have been here for a long time, this is why we're moving to two services. The church right now is not full. You might be thinking, why did we go to two services?

It's not that full. We're going to two services because over the last five years, we've seen God slowly bring more and more people. We're not wanting to be big just to be big, but we do want more and more people to hear the gospel.

And so we're going through this growth pain right now. If you're new, we're going through a growth pain of moving from one to two services so that more people can come and be a part of our church community and hear the preaching of the gospel.

It's also why we do children's ministry, by the way, because we believe that children need to hear the gospel contextualized for their developmental stage. And so that's why we do it.

It's also why we have missions partnerships with places like Bridges of Hope and the 180 Center and other ministries in the city, because we believe that the gospel should go out to all people, to this whole community, to the big old university behind us, to the homeless people who live on the green, to the various communities in Fairhaven and Newhallville and the Hill and Prospect Street and Cozy Beach and so on and so forth.

[17 : 15] Because God has called us to bear witness to Jesus Christ in this city and around the world, which is why we partner with our missionaries who serve in Southeast Asia and in Europe and in other places so that we can be a part of what God is doing.

This is the mission and the gospel partnership that God calls us into. And the question for you this morning is that if you're here and you're wondering, as a believer in Christ, why am I here?

Well, because God has called you here as a mission. If you're here starting your time here at university, you're here, yes, to get an education, yes, to get a degree, but even more than that, you are here to be a part of God's mission in this city while you are here.

Who has God put around you to be a part of this gospel mission by bearing witness to? Who has God put around you in this room that you can partner with to do that?

So there's an active gospel mission for sure, but we're not meant to be lone rangers in it as we've seen. This gospel partnership is a shared task and in that relationship, we see the second characteristic.

[18 : 36] In three through eight, we also see that Paul says, gospel citizens show an expression of gospel love for one another. Verse seven, again, it is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart.

Now, when we read something, how you feel this way, we usually think, oh, feelings, this is sentimentality, this is the moment when I have this rush of emotion.

But for Paul, he actually means something a little bit different. By how I feel about you, he means this is my disposition towards you. This is how I view you.

This is not a natural affection of, I like you because you're funny or because we share interests or those sorts of things, but I have an affection for you. I care about you and I view you in a certain way because of the gospel.

Verse eight says, I yearn for you with the affection of Jesus Christ. That is, I see you the way Christ sees you as a fellow citizen of God's family.

[19 : 45] I see you as someone who, like Christ, longs for your spiritual well-being. This word yearning has, it actually, its roots is from our gut, not from our heart.

It's from our gut. I have this gut longing for you to be steadfast in the gospel. He calls them at the beginning of the letter, you are saints.

And to be in relationship with them brings him great joy. He has them in his heart. And as he writes this, he says, and I am so jazzed about what God is doing in you.

This is what verse six is about. This is a wonderful verse. Look with me at it. I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

Paul writes with this affection saying, I have seen God at work in you. I know God is there. I know that he has started something. Not only has he started it, but I am so confident because I've seen God at work in you, he is going to finish it.

[20 : 55] He is going to take this home. God has got you. God has got this. This is based on his understanding of the sufficiency of Christ's work, that Christ has done all that we need for our salvation.

It's not up to our ongoing obedience to achieve this end, but we're called to obedience out of the security that we have in Christ. And Paul says, I yearn for you as one who will be my forever gospel family.

And I love you because of Christ and because of what God is doing in you. Paul saw them as fellow gospel citizens and to model how we ought to see one another in the church.

It's easy today in our culture to call love something very sentimental and very easy. It's how we mesh. It's how we get along.

We have shared interests. We come from the same backgrounds. We feel strong passions or emotions. And this is what love is in our culture. But Paul says there's actually a greater culture or greater love than that.

[22 : 12] A love that is based on commitment. A love that is based on viewing people the way God sees them. A love that sees I see you and I value you and I treasure you not because of some passing human affection but because of what God has made you to be and what God has saved you to be and the value that God puts on you as both a created person and a redeemed member of the gospel community.

And friends this is part of what I love about our Trinity community is that I see this. We don't gather together because we share common interests. We don't share age and stage of life.

We don't share race or socioeconomic or educational status. We certainly don't share political affiliations or allegiances across the board but we do share in the gospel.

And we come together and worship with one another and love one another well because of it. One of the examples throughout the pandemic this has become even more true.

It happened before so but I've seen there's a bunch of people in our church who go out to lunch after service. I think this will probably happen after the second service now so I don't know how you all are going to navigate that.

[23 : 29] Maybe you want to come back at 1230 to join the lunch bunch. But it's this wonderfully diverse group of people who just say hey we're here with one another brothers and sisters let's go have fellowship together and eat.

And they eat good food and it's a cross section of our church. It's a wonderful group of people that just spontaneously said let's spend time together. And just one example of many that I could give of the places where I see this happening already at Trinity.

And Paul says to us as he said to the Philippians do still more. Finally if gospel partnership is something Paul is thankful for if gospel love is something that he's encouraged by engaged in the last thing is that he is prayerful for gospel fruit.

What does he mean by this? Look with me at verses 9 through 11. My prayer is that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Paul prays his engagement with the gospel communities that he prays for them but what he prays for them is not for Aunt Millie's you know hammer toe to get healed although it's okay to pray for those things.

[24 : 52] It's not praying that they get good jobs although it's okay to pray for those things. What he prays for is their spiritual growth in the gospel and particularly in the context that they're in that they would grow in love and that this love for God for their world and for one another would be increasingly characterized by knowledge and discernment that leads to pure living.

Paul prays that they would not just be loving in the sort of tolerant sense of hey it's okay you can do whatever you want that our world tends to embrace but to love with a knowledge of what is right and wrong what is good and what is evil what is life giving and what is destructive in this world according to God and his word and Paul prays that this church would know that more and more because they know the pull he knows the pull of the Roman culture saying there are other things you should value more than the gospel there are other things that you should value more than God's word there are other things that should be higher priority than this mission that God has called you on Paul says I pray that you would love with knowledge and discernment so that you would understand from God's

perspective this world and how to navigate it with grace and truth and that as you understand these things more and more that you would live a life that is pure and blameless this doesn't mean perfection but it means people who live knowing what is right and wrong knowing who God is in the world and living not as a Roman citizen but as a citizen of heaven and Paul prays that these things would abound more and more and as he prays for them he points to the foundation the fruit of the righteousness that comes from Christ Jesus this is the key to the gospel we're going to preach on it again when we get to chapter 3 but let me just rephrase it

Paul says all of this flows right your growth as a Christian community this prayer being fulfilled in us to live counter-culturally his prayer for them is rooted and grounded in this gospel not that we are going to be righteous by knowing more and getting things more and more right but that we are righteous because we have a righteousness that comes from Christ this is what Paul will see in chapter 3 verse 9 not my own righteousness because my own righteousness will never get me there I am not smart enough I am not faithful enough I am not strong enough to get there on my own but Christ has given me a righteousness outside of myself that is all I need to be brought into this citizenship of heaven into this family with God and this righteousness is Christ's righteousness given to us it covers us and makes us right with God we trust that Jesus' death is sufficient for our forgiveness we believe that Jesus rose from the dead to give us life and we lean on this gift of righteousness so that we can be gods so that what he has given to us then becomes the fountain of this life that we now live for him the gospel that is bearing fruit in the Philippians and in us the gospel that is the focus of their gospel partnership it is the fountain of their gospel love and it is the focus of his prayers that we would know this gospel more and more that we might know Christ more and more the initiator the sustainer and the finisher of our faith and so Paul prays do still more do still more if you want to grow in your prayers for one another D.A. Carson Nick mentioned him earlier he's got another great book called Praying with Paul the priority of Paul in his prayers goes through all the letters of Paul and just says what did Paul pray for maybe these are things we should pray for for one another and for ourselves as well there's a copy of it in the book stall downstairs and if you need more let me know we'll get some but friends as we think about this as Paul prays for gospel fruit in the Philippians we think about this for ourselves how do we pray? do we pray for gospel fruit in our lives? do we pray for our love to abound in discernment? do we pray for one another to be steadfast in the stream of a culture that flows the other way against us? [29 : 43] do we pray that we would be ultimately caught up with the vision that Paul ends his prayer with that we would live to the praise and glory of God so that God would be seen to be great so that God would be seen to be an awesome God worthy worthy of our proclamation of him worthy of our suffering worthy of our attention worthy of our fellowship with one another let's go ahead and pray and ask the Lord to do that for us Lord we thank you this morning for this word and we pray that you would help us to be gospel citizens Lord to live not according to the world but to live according to the good news of what you've done in Jesus I pray Lord that you would encourage us this morning to pursue you I pray as well that you would help us Lord to pursue one another to encourage one another as we have opportunity to stand fast and to press on in this journey and this mission that you've called us and we pray these things in Jesus name

Amen