

Thanksgiving

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[0 : 00] Philippians, Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, and we're going to start from chapter 1, and we're going to read the first 18 verses, so Philippians 1, verse 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 making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, and I'm sure of this, that he who has begun 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 my defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, 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 approve what is excellent and 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. I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has been known throughout the whole Imperial Guard, and to all the rest in my imprisonment, is for Christ.

And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am here, I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. And I know God will bless the freedom of his word. We're going to come to consider God's word just after we sing this next piece.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[4 : 59] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Everyone sings.

Holy is the Lord, God Almighty. The earth is filled with glory.

Holy is the Lord, God Almighty. The earth is filled with glory.

[6 : 18] The earth is filled with glory. I don't know if many of you send postcards whenever you're on holiday.

Some of you are maybe asking, first of all, what's a holiday? But I can remember holidays growing up. And after a few days, we had to make the trip to the local souvenir shop to buy, amongst other things, some postcards.

Who bought? Well, for anyone really, for granny and granda, for aunts and uncles, for the neighbour next door who looked after the dog and put the bin out. First, I personally never really saw the point in it.

And I apologise if you're somebody that sends them. And for two reasons. Firstly, you were always home before they were. And second of all, personally, I'd want nothing else, nothing less, on a rainy Tuesday morning in the post.

And a postcard with a beautiful picture on it from Majorca or Florida saying, wish you were here. Now, Paul is writing here. He's writing a very different sort of postcard.

[7 : 39] He's certainly not saying, wish you were here. For he's writing to the Philippians from prison. Or at least from house arrest in Rome. In fact, it's probably less of a postcard and probably more of a thank you note.

See, since Paul had left them, in fact, he'd been chased out of town. The church in Philippi had been diligent in supporting Paul. Chapter 4 says, Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only.

And he begins his letter with his signature greeting. In the first century letter writing, it was common practice, rather than to put your signature at the end, as we would do, was to put your name at the start.

Paul had a very distinctive signature. He begins most of his letters in a similar way. Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ to the church or saints in Corinth or Ephesus or Philippi or whoever he was writing to, grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ.

So who is Paul writing to? Well, verse 2 tells us that all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi. Now, to sort of get an idea of who exactly these saints were, we need to have a look, and we're not going to turn here tonight because time doesn't permit to, Acts 16, and focuses on Paul's visit to Philippi.

[9 : 15] There we find who some of the first converts to Christianity included Lydia, an independent businesswoman of reputable character and God-fearing minds.

We have an unfortunate demon-possessed slave daughter, and also a hardened Roman jailer who was working the night shift and had just been saved from suicide.

Hardly people I would define, maybe you would, as saints. But it's important to note, the term here is not in relation to their behaviour, but their standing in the sight of God.

And what is that standing? Well, Paul tells us that they're in Christ Jesus, or as the Good News Version puts it, in union with Christ Jesus. Isn't it great that God is no respecter of background or upbringing?

If we're a child, we're a saint. We have been declared righteous through the work of Jesus on the cross. And while we're still sinful, our standing before God has dramatically changed.

[10 : 20] The significance of this, Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians, is that if anyone is in Christ, the old is gone, and the new is here, is a new creation. So we spent a short time looking at Paul's introduction, and to some of the recipients.

What we're going to do, just for a brief period this evening, is look at the remainder of our passage in two sections. Firstly, what we'll do is we'll consider the fellowship of the Gospel, and then secondly, the furtherance of the Gospel.

I like to sort of do it that way. It helps the way I think. What I also want you to notice is that the centre of these points is Paul's declaration in verse 6, where he says, I am sure of this, that he who begun a good work in you will bring it to completion.

So firstly then, the fellowship of the Gospel. Paul follows his greeting in the way that he does the majority of his letters, with thanksgiving to God.

In this case, his thanksgiving is for the church in Philippi itself. It is a source of encouragement to him, and it's also interesting to note that he prays for them with joy.

[11 : 33] But why does Paul pray for them? Because of their partnership with him in the Gospel, or some translations put it, fellowship. Now, both of these words have lost a certain depth of meaning over recent years.

When you mention fellowship, maybe in certain church circles, it's associated maybe with a cup of tea and a chat about the football after the church service. Partnership, on the other hand, has maybe a more legal connotations, maybe more of a business term.

What Paul is saying is that the centre of their relationship was the fellowship and their partnership in the Gospel, i.e. their union together with Christ.

As we mentioned earlier, Paul was in prison and needed a partner like the church in Philippi, who supported him financially, as we read earlier. But also, they had a concern for his personal welfare, even during his prison.

Verse 7 reads, And where does his confidence in his prayers come from?

[12 : 45] Here we come to our thesis statement here in verse 6, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

This is the very foundation of spiritual growth. Realise that it is God who starts it, and it is only God who can finish it.

God has a long-term plan for each of them. He writes in Romans 8, And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Believers can go through pain, loss, suffering. And why? Because they have the confidence that God has a long-term plan for their lives.

It's as if God has put an under-construction sign on each one of them. And the same is true with us. If we are in Christ, then we aren't the finished article yet.

[13 : 44] We make mistakes, rash decisions, errors of judgment. And yet, because we are in Christ, it's reassuring to know that neither life nor death, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things past or present, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God.

So we've seen what Paul's attitude to his prayer, and that is the thankfulness to the church. Verses 9 to 11, we find out actually what Paul prays for them.

And there's a progression in his prayer that helps us understand the full meaning of what exactly he's praying for the Philippians here. He prays that each one of them would have love, and more than that, that their love may abide more and more, and furthermore, that it is accompanied with knowledge and depth of insight, so that they would be able to discern what is best, and may be pure and blameless, and ultimately that their lives would bring glory and praise to God.

What does that all mean? Paul knew that there would be differences in the church, as there are in every church. He's not advocating here an agree-to-disagree mentality on things that they maybe didn't see eye-to-eye on.

He is saying that the spiritual maturity that they're growing in, in verse 6, should bring with it the ability and the patience to be able to sit down and discuss with each other the finer points of their theology, so that they can, as Paul says, discern what's best.

[15 : 27] And remember, these people were out of new Christians, and their spiritual mentor had been chased out of town shortly after their conversion, so they had plenty to figure out with regards to their faith.

Later in chapter 2, Paul urges them to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. As Christians grow in their understanding of what it means to follow Jesus, they will increasingly be able to know and practice what is excellent and therefore produce the fruit of righteousness.

And what does Paul pray this excellence in the Philippian spiritual roots would bring? Verse 11 finishes by telling us that their lives would give praise and glory to God.

Paul here echoes the words of Jesus in Matthew 5, and he says, Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Both the slaves and the saints, their lives, and indeed ours, are to reflect that of the masters.

believers. So we've considered the fellowship of the gospel between the Corinthians and Paul, and now we look, we come to look at the furtherance of the gospel.

[16 : 46] Verse 12 says, I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has served to advance the gospel. Well, as we've alluded to a number of times, the thing that has happened to him is that he was under a house arrest in Rome.

How did this make Paul feel? Well, for most of us, if we were in Paul's shoes, we would have been feeling maybe sorry for ourselves, maybe wondering if or when we would get released, maybe even taking this time to plan for the future, for maybe for other missionary journeys that he had planned to make.

Maybe it was God's way of giving him a rest. No, not for Paul. We read four words in verse 16 that tells us, I am put here.

Paul recognised that he, that there was a part of God, sorry, that this was a part of God's plan for his life. And what was that plan? Well, we find that right after his conversion back in Acts chapter 9, when God is speaking to Ananias, speaking about Paul, saying, go, for he is chosen as Paul, his chosen instrument of mine to carry the name, my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. Paul knew that this was all part of God's plan for his life and that he was called to be faithful to that God.

[18 : 18] Later, he writes in chapter 4, not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

I know how to be brought low and how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty of hunger, abundance and need.

In spite of his circumstances, Paul was still, through the help of the Holy Spirit, determined to see the gospel advance. So how did the gospel advance?

Well, verses 13 and 14 tell us of three ways. Firstly, it became known throughout the whole imperial guard. See, being under house arrest would have meant that Paul would have had a certain amount of freedom, but it also meant that he would have been chained to a guard.

Paul saw this as a captive audience and took his opportunities to share Jesus with each of the guards as they did their shifts with him. And so, news of Paul's message would soon spread throughout the whole guard.

[19 : 29] Second group of people who heard the gospel were those in prison with Paul. As Paul had a captive audience with the guards that were with him, as part of that audience were those who were in prison with him as well as they weren't going anywhere either.

and also those from the church in Rome had become confident enough to share the good news themselves. News had spread beyond the confines of the prison complex to the Christians who were living in Rome.

Hearing of how God had provided for Paul in prison and given opportunities to share the gospel, gave those who were believers their confidence to trust God so that they were able to speak the word with more boldness and without failure.

When we see the different people who were reached by Paul's message, it's clear to see God's plan throughout it all. The guards, the prisoners, were never going to come to hear one of Paul's messages.

So God took steps to ensure that the message came to them. A brief point of application and passing. I wonder how quick we are to take advantage of the captive audiences that we face regularly.

[20 : 46] And I speak to myself in this. You might be saying, right, I've never been chained to a guard and I hope that's true. What about the person sitting next to you on the bus or the train home from work?

What about the hairdresser, the taxi driver? Are we spiritually aware enough to see these people as Jesus seeing them? Like sheep without a shepherd.

And so the gospel was being spread. But Paul here picks up on the motives of those who were preaching the message and that some were doing it out of ulterior motives. Verse 15 tells us that some were preaching Christ from envy and rivalry.

And verse 17 says that they were proclaiming Christ out of selfish ambition. How does this affect Paul or how does Paul feel about this? Verse 18 what may or what does it matter?

Paul's primary concern here was the spread of the gospel. He says nothing about the fact that they were peddling a false gospel. Had that been the case, Paul's reaction would have been very different.

[21 : 53] All you have to do is read his letter to the Galatians to see that. Now, Paul is satisfied here that they are teaching a genuine gospel and therefore he is unconcerned with their motives.

He is content to let God take care of those. He says in verse 18, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.

How often we get caught up in envy and rivalry between fellowships. We refuse to rejoice when God chooses to bless the church down the road, perhaps even between ministries within a fellowship, when God chooses to bless a certain ministry over another.

We, like Paul, are called to be faithful. He says a bit more about this relationship when he is talking to the Corinthians. He says of himself and Apollos, what then is Apollos?

What is Paul? Servants through whom you have believed. As the Lord assigned to each, I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

[23 : 06] So neither he who plants, nor he who waters his anything, but only God who gives the growth. Just as I finish, I am sure of this, that he who has begun a good work in you, will bring it to completion.

If you're in Christ this evening, God has a plan for your life. To balance that, just to make sure I'm not sounding like one of those prosperity preachers, what we have to do is we have to look at God's plan for Paul's life to see where it took him.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul tells us, five times I received at the hands of the Jews forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, day and night I was adrift at sea, on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from the Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, in hardship and toil, in hunger and thirst, and often without food and cold exposure.

And although we will never go through, or hopefully we'll never go through all that with the gospel, through the example of Paul, we must strive to be like the believers in the Roman church, with the help of the Holy Spirit to become confident in the Lord and become much bolder to speak the word without fear.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[24 : 58] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.