

Philippians 1:3-11

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Date: 31 January 2021

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Open up your Bibles to Philippians. So obviously me preaching this morning was a backup for Nathan.

! So I'm sorry, college students. This will be probably the third time you've heard me in the span of a week. But when he asked me, I didn't really have too much hesitation.

And the reason is, at our elder meeting last month, or beginning of this month, excuse me, we were all talking about how Philippians is such a warm and familiar letter.

And it feels like going back to an old friend when you open it. We started this church a long time ago by preaching through Philippians. And so it's a very familiar and warm text to go to.

So it wasn't like picking into some obscure text in Scripture. It was like, oh, Philippians, yes, we got that. And the joy that is a theme in Philippians, we thought would be especially applicable during our time, during our day, when so much seems to be focused on the brokenness of the world.

[1 : 18] And so much so that it can bring great sorrow to us. And all of us that are in Christ know that he gives us a joy that is not of this world.

And we can have that by having Christ in our lives. So we just started Philippians last week. So if you're new on the scene, you haven't missed too much. But we're only going to pick up in verse 3 today.

But let's just begin by backing up. There's only two verses ahead of this. Our text today is going to be 3 through 11. But starting in chapter 1, we read, I thank you, 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 remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine, for you all making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart.

[2 : 47] For you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in my defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ Jesus.

And that is my prayer that your love may abound more and more. With the 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. Join me in prayer again.

Lord, we just submit this time to you this morning. Pray that you would speak to us through your word and by your Holy Spirit. Challenge, build up, have your way with us this morning.

May your word be exalted and may we leave here not just being hearers, but doers of your word. We ask that in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. So, as we talked about, I love Philippians because there's a lot of cool history just in the idea of Philippi and the Roman Empire.

[4 : 06] But I'll spare you all that this morning. But you ought to go online and look up some of the cool pictures of Philippi. It actually was named after Philip of Macedon, which is Alexander the Great's father.

And it was called the mini-Rome. It really was like taking the city of Rome and just making a miniature version of it almost. But it had an amphitheater, an acropolis.

It had a forum for shopping and all that. So it was like a mini-Rome. And it was settled by many Roman legionaries who were discharged from service after the Battle of Actium, which is where Augustus Caesar defeated Anthony and baby cakes Cleopatra in 31 B.C.

So it was largely a Macedonian population and had a small Jewish population. So that's the context. But the occasion is Paul is writing from his imprisonment, as we see in our text, in Rome. And Paul probably had much worse imprisonments than this one. More than likely, according to the end of Acts, Acts 28, it was either some form of house arrest or he had some form of a suitable jail cell because he was a Roman citizen.

[5 : 24] He had his own quarters and he was allowed people could come and go as they pleased to talk to him. And so he said that he shared the gospel unhindered at the end of the book of Acts.

So this is his first imprisonment in Rome, not his second one. And even Paul mentions that he feels confident that he'll be released from this imprisonment.

He says that in chapter 1, verse 13, and then later on in chapter 4, verse 22. But he was awaiting trial, hopefully, to be heard by the emperor, which would have been Nero at the time, but more than likely.

He actually probably wasn't heard, but he was acquitted. And I could go through all the arguments for why I believe that. But we can go to the purpose of the letter.

And the letter has a lot of purposes, but I would say the mood or the tone of Paul's letter, again, is like warm, affectionate, casual, informal.

[6 : 26] And it was a type of ancient letter called a letter of friendship. And he's celebrating his longstanding partnership with the Philippian believers. And that word partnership in our text today is the Greek word koinonia.

I know a lot of us are aware of that word. But it's a divinely intimate, holy fellowship, unity among believers with each other, but also that unity that exists with Christ.

So our unity with Christ, when we become one with him, and by faith, we become one with each other. We become a part of the same body as believers.

And we're participating together in the grace of our salvation in him. So it's a heartfelt letter celebrating their common joy in Christ and God's genuine work in them as a church.

You know, in ministry, there's a lot of different people that you get concerned about, that you always feel like you have to kind of watch. And then there's those that are always just like refreshing when you're around them. And they build you up when you're around them.

[7 : 32] And you feel like you can just kind of let your guard down and just be yourself. And that's kind of how Paul, I think, really felt with the Philippian church. And so we can begin looking at verse 3, just a little introduction here.

There's going to be a specific focus of our time, but I don't want to skip over the rest of it. But in verse 3, Paul says, My God, I thank my God.

So his first phrase here is this personal intimate relationship with Christ. And why is that important? Luther said a long time ago that Christianity is a matter of personal pronouns. And if we can't confess that truly, then something is wrong in our relationship with Christ.

So he is my God. Remember when Jesus said, after he rose from the dead, he said to the disciples, I'm ascending to my Father and your Father, my God and your God.

[8 : 38] And so this is all about knowing Christ. And we only belong to each other through Christ. But I want to point out just briefly, by way of introduction, three indications of genuine Christian love.

Maybe how do I even practice koinonia? Three indications of genuine Christian love. And the first one is, Paul has them on his mind.

So if you see verse 3, I thank God in all remembrance of you. So we are to think about one another. We're to ponder one another.

We're to bring each other to mind and seek the good and welfare of one another as believers. So we have a lot of different ways to remind ourselves of all the people that we're surrounded with in the body.

But Paul has them on his mind. So that's one way. We have to think about them. And sometimes we need help being reminded. But he remembers them. So that's the first one.

[9 : 43] Secondly, he has them in his heart. You can see that in verse 7. It is right for me to feel this way about you because I hold you in my heart. Then verse 8.

For God is my witness how I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ. So Christ gives his people a deep, real, ardent love, not just for him but for one another.

It's impossible to say I love Christ but I hate his church or I dislike his church. And we belong to one another. And that love, hatred is evidence of blindness to the light.

But love is evidence that sight has been given to the blind. Like we love one another because of what Christ has done for us. Indeed, he said, all the world will know that you are my disciples by your love for one another.

And it sounds kind of far-fetched. Like we can't really reciprocate that kind of love. It sounds impossible. No, you can't reciprocate it on your own.

[10:48] This is the miracle that comes from being born again by the Spirit of God. He gives us his love so that we may love one another. It's empowered by the Holy Spirit so that we can love as Christ has loved.

So, he has them on his mind. He has them in his heart. And then lastly and thirdly, he has them in his prayers. So verse 4, Always in every prayer of mine, for you are making all my prayer with joy. And then look at verse 9. It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with all knowledge and discernment. And so, we don't just think about one another.

We don't just have feelings for one another. But that should lead us to prayer for one another. And I know that it's a habit of many people, and I'll put myself in that category, to kind of pass by and sort of say, Hey, I'll pray for you.

I'm going to pray for that. And it's a verse in 1 Samuel 12. The nation of Israel is pleading with Samuel as a prophet to intercede for them on their behalf to God.

[12:08] And Samuel says this, and it's just convicting. He says, Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you.

Let's connect that together. So, it's a sinful response for us to not pray for one another, to cease to pray for one another. And, that's verse 1 Samuel 12, 23, if you want to look that up.

But, we have each other in our minds. We're remembering each other in our hearts. And He has them in His prayers. So, those are three ways that we can practice genuine Christian love and fellowship among one another.

But, the main focus of the message today, I wanted to get particularly to verse 6. And, because I know that many of us are very tired and weary a lot of the time.

Even though we've been saved by God, and we have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, the fullness of that salvation still isn't fully realized.

[13:15] And, even as followers of Christ, we face the devastating effects of sin in our lives, and we see it in the world around us. We hear Christ calling us to follow Him, to deny ourselves, to pick up our cross and follow Him, and to love Him, love our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

But, somehow, we just never arise to the totality of that in this life. And, we lose sight of the gospel promises. It's easy for us to get weighed down by our own sin and the brokenness in the world around us.

And, a lot of us, including myself to some degree, have a tendency to focus more on our lacking imperfections, the things that the remaining sin in our lives, rather than rejoice at what God has done.

And, so, we fall into a lot of the same sins, temptations, and it grieves us. We kind of cry out, how long, O Lord, must we endure this? And, I'm sure all of us have had seasons like that, where we just wonder, are we going to make it?

Because it's so tiring. I'm so overwhelmed. I mean, I get overwhelmed by looking in the brokenness in the world, and being like, I'm just one guy.

[14:35] There's nothing I can really do to help. And, weariness of ministry. And, due to my own sin and shortcomings, insufficiencies, I can feel just helpless to even continue on the mission.

And, just beg Christ to come back and end it. There's even times, you know, that I've sympathized a little bit with Elijah, when he said, Lord, take my life from me, because I'm no better than my father's.

I've felt that way before. Where he said, I'm not going to take my own life, but Lord, if you would take it, I would appreciate it. We've all been there, or some of us have been there to that point. And, we just feel like we can't go on, we won't survive.

But, God is faithful to us. And, I wanted to read this one short quote to you. But, a Puritan writer, John Flavel, this is something that has meant a lot to me over the years, this statement.

He says, And, the main focus of the message today is to look at three different points to help Paul's joy relate to us, to have the same joy he had for our weary souls.

[16:02] And, it's a focus on God's persevering work in our salvation. We, in Christ, are kept by God's power. We will persevere. We will continue to fight on, even until the end, until we die, and go home to be the Lord until Christ returns.

He's going to preserve us, and keep us. And, that gives us strength to keep going. And, so, we're going to talk about this in terms of tenses, like past, present, future.

But, number one, God started a good work in us. That's the past tense. So, look at verse 5.

He says, Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And then look at verse 6. For I am sure of this, that he who began a good work.

So, from the first day, when he started the good work, is the past tense. Now, I want you to think, when you came to know the Lord, what happened?

[17:10] What were the events leading up to that? Was it a season of time, or was it more of a moment? And, what happened? Did we just all of a sudden wise up, and decided to turn over a new leaf, and live better lives, and be good Christians, and, you know, be moral people?

The truth is, no. Scripture does not teach that about our former state before we were in Christ. It says that we were dead in our trespasses and sin.

It says that we were under the power and influence of Satan. It says that we followed the strong current of this world, and that we were slaves to the fallen passions of our flesh, being defiant and disobedient to God.

It's a situation that's helpless. Nothing we could even do about it. But this is all in Ephesians 2. But, Ephesians 2, verse 4, there's a change.

It talks about our lost state. But then it says, but God, being rich, and mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, not that we loved Him, that He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

[18:28] By grace, you have been saved. So our spiritual life began by God's sovereign initiating grace. In 1 John, this is mentioned a lot, 1 John 4, verse 10, and this is love, not that we had loved God, but that He had loved us and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins.

And in verse 19 of chapter 4, we love because He first loved us. So if you look back in your life, you'll see God working in His providence through different people, different circumstances to bring you to faith.

You'll see Him underneath everything going on. And He wasn't just kind of standing idly by. He was hunting you down. He was pursuing you.

And we should be grateful for that because of His great mercy for which He loved us. So God started a good work, past tense.

Second point, God is continuing a good work in us. So, present tense. Look at verse 5.

[19:45] Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. Verse 7. It is right for me to feel this way about you because I hold you in my heart for we are all partakers with me of grace.

Look at verse 11. They would be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. So He's pointing out present evidences of grace in them.

Like God is working in you right now. We are actively participating in the grace of God together. So, firstly, He points out their financial support that they gave Him.

And to advance the gospel, the partnership is synonymous with almsgiving and contributions, heartfelt, sympathetic cooperation. And it had been a while since their last donation.

I think it might have been 10 years. But they finally, but only because they lacked the opportunity to help Paul financially. But they found a way and they gave to him. They also sent a papertitis to deliver the money to Paul and to care for him personally.

[20:56] because being in prison, as I guess today too, is a shameful thing in the ancient world. But they wanted to stand by him and support him regardless of that shame.

They really wanted to care for his well-being. And they wanted to support Paul in his defense and confirmation of the gospel where he was declaring the good news, seeking to persuade others, pleading with others to see the salvation that's in Christ.

So he expressed that presently active, partakers of Christ. So, all resorting to the glory and praise of God.

So flip over to chapter 2 really quickly. Philippians 2. I just want to read a couple verses here. It isn't just, I used to have this wrong mentality a lot of my life that was God started this, God did his part.

He saved you. Now you've got to do your part. Go. And, like this sort of cooperation where I'm going to finish the job. And Paul's words in Galatians is, are you foolish?

[22 : 09] Have you, now having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? And that was convicting. But in Philippians 2, verse 12, it says, therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and tripling.

So, verse 13, look at the present tense, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. So not save yourself, justify yourself, adopt yourself, make yourself acceptable to God, but bring to completion, carry out, in light of what God has done in you, continue to press into that, good old charismatic work, press into that, in the fullness of who you actually are in Christ. He has done this work in you. That's who you are. You've been made a new creation. You've been given a new identity. It's who you are, so now be who you are. Don't, God has done the work, right? And so, it's this mystery of sanctification where it's our responsibility to work, labor, toil, struggle, but somehow, God's, it's not by our own strength, but God's strength that works powerfully within us. Write down Colossians 1, 29 for that. But, what fuels us is the grace of God. And, there was a pastor, I really respect the good old Presbyterian brother, but he also likes history, so that's how I got connected to him.

[23 : 53] His name is Harry Reader. This old guy. I don't know how old he is now. He must be close to 80. But, he wrote this about, like, the active work of God in our lives.

He says, when I was 16, my father bought me a car at an auction for \$75. It was a pink 57 Ford, which dad insisted was coral.

I couldn't drive a pink car to school. I then heard the words that, in the not too distant future, my children would say, son, a poor ride is better than a proud walk.

He just said, that's probably in the Bible somewhere, a poor ride is better than a proud walk. So then he says, then dad opened the hood and to my surprise, underneath was a 390 engine with two four-barrel carburetors.

The car had been a South Carolina state interceptor, a highway patrol car. Nothing had more power under the hood. Space and conviction prevents me from detailing all the surprise that I gave to Corvettes on the highway because he would pull up beside him and rev his engine and he would just like beat him.

[25 : 11] So he said, my pink 57 Ford didn't really look like much on the outside but there was power under the hood.

And same way, we don't look like a lot at all on the outside but because of the work of Christ in us, the regenerating power of his spirit, there is power under the hood.

thirdly and lastly, so the past, present, future is God will finish the good work in us.

Future tense. Verse 6, I am sure of this, I am confident of this, I am certain that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion as a day of Christ Jesus.

so, it isn't just God started it and now he's backing away, he's going to finish it, he's confident, he is sure of this and we have a promise given to us as believers in Christ even though we suffer greatly in this life.

[26 : 18] Jesus said again, familiar verse John 10, my sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

My father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of my father's hand. I and the father are one.

Imagine you got a chance to go on a dream vacation, you saved for it, you planned on it, and you finally flew to your desired destination and the airport was far away from where you wanted to go and a taxi came up and said hey, ten bucks to get to your destination and what if one of you just said that's absurd, I'm not paying ten dollars to get to go there and your spouse, probably your wife would say that's crazy, we've come all this way, ten more dollars is no big deal to get where we want to go, right?

very similarly, do you really think that God the Father would watch his son go through what he went through for no reason?

Do you really think that it was to bring about some potential I hope this will work? Is the son saying I died for these people, but the father saying well I just hope that some of them take advantage of it.

[28 : 00] None of us would allow a loved one to suffer in vain, especially the way that Christ did. Christ is going to see the work through. His blood will not be shed in vain.

He's going to continue the good work that he started in us. God has a great desire to finish what he started. If you go to a lot of different shops throughout the world, like a wood shop for example, you'll find some cool pieces of furniture, chairs, shelves, you might find some things laying there that are unfinished.

I've got several of those. And it's either because they lacked the desire to finish, they ran out of resources, and so they didn't get to finish the job.

But God is not the same way. God doesn't lack the ability or the desire to finish what he started. And he will finish it. So, that's something for us to take comfort in.

He's going to accomplish it. Look at, this is in closing, look at Psalm 138. Psalm 138, verse 6.

[29 : 14] Psalm 138, verse 6. For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.

And though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. See the connections? You stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me.

Mark this, the Lord will fulfill his purpose for me. Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Join me in prayer. Do not not