

MONDAY, 8/12

Read Philippians 1:1-2.

Ok, so here's the thing. I debated between having you read the first two verses of Philippians or the whole book today. I went ahead and put down the first two verses, but my challenge to you is to read the entire letter, all four chapters, in one sitting sometime this week. Philippians is a letter that Paul wrote to the church at Philippi. It was intended to be read in one sitting, and it benefits us to read it that way.

This letter carries a different tone than Paul's other letters. The reason is it is a letter of friendship. It was an act of the church's generosity that sparked the letter. When the church at Philippi learned of Paul's imprisonment, they sent a gift to sustain Paul. In their day, prisoners were either supported by loved ones, or they starved to death. The church came alongside Paul to see to his well-being, and Paul was grateful; hence the letter.

Paul introduces himself in the very first verse of the letter along with Timothy, as "servants" or "slaves of Christ Jesus." This may seem unusual to us. It certainly was uncommon for those with authority like Paul, who was an apostle, to identify himself as a servant. As strange as that may have sounded to Paul's audience who had such respect for him, it was true to Paul's own understanding of his identity. He was sought out by Jesus, and his life had been purchased by His precious blood. This grace that Paul had experienced from Christ bound Paul to Him. Paul counted it a privilege to serve Jesus, who "came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many."

I wonder if we think of ourselves as servants of Jesus. Do we count it a blessing to give back to the One who poured out His life for us? Such an attitude begins with acknowledging what Jesus has done for us and then understanding the impact on our own lives.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, we are Your servants. You are the true servant who came to offer Yourself on behalf of the Father and us. You paid the cost of our salvation. We find joy in returning the blessing. Show me where I can be of service to You. Amen."

TUESDAY, 8/13

Read Philippians 1:3-8.

Paul often opens his letters with thanksgiving. He does so here in Philippians. Paul thanks God for the Philippians' partnership in sharing the gospel, the Good News of Jesus. The church not only responded to Paul's ministry but also joined him in his efforts. They began to contribute financially to sharing the Good News of Jesus and supporting Paul with people and prayers for his work.

This partnership brought Paul great joy, and I imagine the church as well. The sharing of this vital and eternal work became a means by which both experienced God's grace flowing into them. God's grace abounded in their shared work with each party enjoying the blessings of doing Jesus' work. This is what Jesus wants for His church. Jesus is looking for churches to be conduits that experience the blessing of partnering with Him in His work, so that as that grace abounds in our life together, His grace then spills out from us to touch a broken world.

My hope is that you feel joy in being a partner with the ministry of our church. As Jesus' body, we have received His call to reach the world for Christ and make disciples. We come together to join Jesus in that work. Like the Philippian church, we bring our gifts to support Jesus' work. We offer ourselves, our financial gifts, and our prayers so that we might advance Jesus' mission in Midlothian and beyond. When you offer yourself and the resources God has placed in your hands to this work, you should feel joy. That's what Jesus wants His partners in ministry to experience. He wants you to share in His joy.

Praying Together:

"Lord, You have entrusted Your work to us. Thank You for calling us to be partners with You in Your ongoing work in the world. It is a privilege to serve You and with You. May we experience the joy in which You long for Your servants to share. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 8/14

Read Philippians 1:9-11.

I mentioned yesterday that Paul opens his letters with thanksgiving. He also typically opens with a prayer for the church. He offers a prayer for the Philippian church and it's a beautiful one.

Paul prays that the church's love would "abound more and more." Isn't this what the life of the church should produce, a greater capacity to love? Paul envisions a community of Jesus followers in which His love overflows into greater love for one another and for the Lord.

This is a great time to consider whether our love for God and others is abounding. Do we sense His love at home in our hearts?

Now, Paul also clearly defines what this love produces, which helps us better understand what he means by love. This is important because today there are many different thoughts around what it means to love.

Paul prays that their love may abound in "knowledge and depth of insight," which means that it is grounded in understanding Jesus' teachings both with our heads and our hearts. Having experienced Jesus and been instructed by Him, we now have the resources to "discern what is best and may be blameless for the day of Christ"; in other words, we can begin to see and think about the world as Jesus does. This is about holiness. That, with Jesus' help, empowers us to live faithfully in the world, being "filled

with the fruit of righteousness that comes from Jesus Christ." Paul is essentially praying that through Jesus' own love and instruction, we are equipped with what we need to follow and honor Jesus with our lives.

All of this is done to the "glory and praise of God." That is the kind of life that someone who has been touched by God's grace wants to live. We desire to live a life that blesses the One who has so richly and abundantly blessed us.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, may our love abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that we may be able to discern what is best and may 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. Amen."

THURSDAY, 8/15

Read Philippians 1:12-17.

Paul addresses his current status with the church. He is sitting in chains under Roman watch. The conditions in Roman prisons at the time were abysmal. His future remains uncertain.

It is easy to imagine, given these circumstances, that Paul would be dejected. I'll be honest: my natural tendency would be to complain, but that isn't what Paul does. He actually begins by reassuring his friends at Philippi that God is using this for good.

Paul argues that his imprisonment hasn't halted his ministry or dissuaded his other partners in ministry to stop. In fact, it has done just the opposite. Paul's ministry has broken into his new environment in the prison, and his partners have become even more confident than before.

So, how is it that Paul can rejoice even in this state? Paul rejoices because he knows that his current troubles are actually advancing God's Kingdom. For Paul, God's Kingdom is the real world. We often look at our life here on earth as the most true reality. The truth is this world is passing away. God's Kingdom, which knows no end, is the real world, the true reality.

This ought to challenge the way we perceive our reality here on earth. Because we are alive on earth, it is easier to value our existence in this world more than our life that is tucked away with Jesus. It is all too easy to get so caught up in the day-to-day that God's Kingdom is a distant thought.

As Christians, we must learn to live with an ever-present awareness of the awesome reality of God's Kingdom. If we don't, the danger is that we will miss the opportunities and misuse the resources God has for us to participate in His work. What a shame it would be to see the glories of heaven and regret what we did not do. However, if we

can begin to see and live in God's Kingdom, which is reality now, and invest ourselves in it, then we can enjoy the greatest of blessings God has in store for us.

Praying Together:

"Father, Your Kingdom come, Your will be done in me. Open my eyes to the wonderful reality of Your Kingdom. Forgive me when I get so consumed with the activity and life in this world. Teach me to live in this world with Your Kingdom in mind. Empower me to love and serve both You and others in light of this reality. Amen."

FRIDAY, 8/16

Read Philippians 1:18-26.

What is your greatest desire? Be honest with yourself. What is the one thing you want to see become a reality? You want it so much that you will give your money, time, and even spend yourself to see it happen.

For Paul, his desire was to see that the Good News of Christ was preached to the world. He longed to see Jesus exalted in his life. Paul didn't care whether that happened in his living or his dying. Either way, he would do whatever he could to bring Jesus glory.

Paul said in verse 21, "For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain". In other words, *If I get out of jail and go on living, it will be for Christ. If I die in this cell, then I gain new life in Christ.* Paul figured, either way, he could not lose.

I appreciate that Paul doesn't come to Jesus with his own agenda. Paul doesn't know his fate. It could go either way. He doesn't look at it as if Jesus must free him from jail. It's easy to do that. Sometimes we come to God with expectations that He will carry out our will. While that is understandable, it isn't faithful. Jesus models the right spirit for us in His prayer in the garden when He said, "Not My will, but Thy will be done."

Paul follows Jesus' lead trusting that He will deliver Him. He will either see the light of day again or he will open his eyes in Jesus' glorious presence. While Paul considered the latter to be the far greater choice, he concluded that the church could still benefit from his encouragement. Paul chooses that, as much as it is up to him, he will continue living to build the church and share the gospel.

I'm humbled by Paul's drive to serve the Lord. He put God's will above his own. He sought to offer his life in service to God based on the example set by Jesus. I wonder what we need to do to move closer to Paul's conviction.

Praying Together:

"Lord, You are worthy of our service. You showed us the way to embrace God's will before our own. Give us a renewed desire to share Christ with the world. Help us to lay down our own desires and thoughts so that we may embrace Your calling to be Your witnesses in the world--the people who share what we have seen, heard, and experienced of You. Amen."

SATURDAY, 8/17

Read Philippians 3:1-11.

Jump with me over to Philippians chapter 3. I know that seems like a leap, but let me explain. Often, we wonder how Paul could have joy while in chains. How is it that Paul could rejoice when he didn't know if he would be ever delivered from a cold, damp jail cell? The answer to that question comes out here in chapter 3.

Paul kicks off the chapter with a burst of joy. "Rejoice in the Lord!" he said. He says it's no trouble to repeat that because it has the power to safeguard his followers' hearts. Thanksgiving and joy have a way of renewing and refreshing the heart.

Paul then challenges a group of people he calls "mutilators of the flesh." These are people who profess belief in Jesus, yet tell Christians they must be circumcised to follow Jesus. Paul says that such a belief is not putting one's confidence in God, but in what they can do to save themselves.

Paul says if anyone has reason to trust that they could be good enough to save themselves, he would be a good candidate. In verses 5-6, Paul puts his resume down for us to see. What he is saying here is that he has achieved moral and spiritual excellence within the Jewish religion. He was the one everyone looked at as the example of how to live. The only problem for Paul was even though he had arrived, so to speak, he still felt broken. He felt that religion hadn't freed him; in fact, it had done just the opposite. It didn't deliver him; it had put him in chains. It wasn't until Jesus found him that Paul was changed.

When Jesus met Paul on that road, Paul found in Christ One who was truly righteous. Held against the backdrop of Jesus' glory, Paul's accomplishments looked like nothing--sewer trash, he said. Paul didn't hesitate to trade all of them for "the surpassing worth" of knowing Jesus. Paul let go of those things--of confidence in himself--so that he might gain Christ. His confidence fell on Christ to be righteous where he was broken in sin.

So why was Paul unafraid of being in chains while facing an uncertain future? He was unafraid because Jesus had already delivered him from chains before. When he was shackled by sin and religion's solution, Jesus broke those chains. Whether Paul would go on living or be executed, he knew Jesus would deliver him again. Jesus freed Paul, and in so doing, gave Paul the life that is truly life.

How wonderful is it that Jesus will do the same for you and me when we too put our hope and confidence in Him.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, thank You for breaking our chains. How often we have sought to be good on our own terms only to flail about in our own brokenness. You offer us a true righteousness in the gift of Yourself. We too want to know You and the power of Your life living in us. Open our eyes to who You are and transform us. Amen."

SUNDAY, 8/18

Read Philippians 3:12-14.

Paul is quick to tell the church that even though he has found life and joy in Christ, he has not arrived.

I'm grateful for these three verses. Growing up in the church, I felt like the message at times was that once we prayed to ask Jesus in our hearts, what we did with the rest of our life wasn't all that important. We got our "Get Out of Hell Free Card" as I like to call it.

That is not the vision Jesus has for those He saves. Placing our hope and faith in Christ isn't the end but a new beginning. We've just entered the threshold of a glorious new life with Jesus that He made possible for us. We haven't arrived. We have just been born into a new kind of existence.

Paul's advice is for us to press on into this life. Pursue this new life in Christ. Seek Him. Get to know Him. Come to love and trust His will for your life.

Paul even says to let go of your past. Don't let what you have been keep you from growing into what you are now in Christ. Some of us need to hear that. Paul says to forget what is behind you. Press on toward what Jesus has ahead for you. Shift your focus. Some of us are stalled out in our life with Christ because we can't let go of our past. If Jesus has freed you and forgiven you, then move on toward what He has for you now.

Praying Together:

"Most Glorious God, I want to enjoy my new life in You. Fix my eyes on the prize You have in store for me, the prize Jesus won for me. Help me press on into this new life that I may live for Your glory. Amen."