

Praying for our Church (Psalm 138 & Philippians 1:1-11) 8-Apr-2018

Just a reminder that there are Bible's in front of you and there's an outline in the bulletin for you to take down notes if that helps you concentrate

Let me pray for God's help and understanding. Let's pray...

Context/Philippi

We begin a new series today - from the Apostle Paul's letter (epistle) to the people of Philippi - the Philippians

Philippi is a city in Macedonia, part of Ancient Greece. The city of Philippi was named after **Philip of Macedonia**, the **father of Alexander the Great**.

During the Apostle Paul's second missionary journey (49-52AD), Paul established the church in Philippi.

[Powerpoint 1-Philippi and 2nd Missionary Journey]

[Explain Map: Blue=Jerusalem and Red=Philippi]

We can read about this in **Acts chapter 16**.

Where a woman called **Lydia** and a **Philippian jailor** became Christians, and the early Christian church in Philippi was established.

Now Paul is in prison - probably in Rome - and he writes this encouraging letter (epistle) to the growing church in Philippi

And the theme of his letter is to **encourage** his fellow Christians in Philippi - and to **rejoice (have joy)** in the fact that he has fellow brothers and sisters in

Jesus - and for Paul it doesn't matter that he is in prison - the main thing is that the Gospel (Good News) of Jesus is alive and well in the church of Philippi.

From Paul's letter we see how he **feels** for the Philippians

And how he **prays** for them...

Intro

So - to begin with then:

[Powerpoint 2a-Feel]

How do we **feel** about our church family?

Do we feel it is close & loving family?

Or just acquaintances?

Or a bunch of strangers?

(pause)

Do we **pray** for our church family? Yes/No? Sometimes?

[Powerpoint 2b-Pray]

We can learn a lot about how Paul **feels** about his church family in Philippi and how he **prays** for them...

So let's take a closer look at the first 11 verses of chapter 1

[Please turn there now]

Greeting (vv1-2)

Verse 1 and 2 begin - like any letter - with a greeting

A bit like "Greetings from Uncle Tom - Dear nephew Fred..."

So looking at verse 1

[Powerpoint 3]

The letter is from the apostle Paul but he includes Timothy, his protégé (disciple) - because Timothy is a partner in the Gospel - and will one day take over the ministry to the churches that Paul has helped to plant

Paul describes himself and Timothy as **servants** of Christ Jesus

They are literally slaves -

[If you watch TV shows like "Upstairs/Downstairs" or "Downtown Abbey" - you'll see the master of the house has servants who are there to purely serve their master. If the servant has plans for a night out - and the master has a dinner party - then the servant's plans go out the window - the master's needs come first]

And so Paul and Timothy's lives are devoted completely to serving their Master - Jesus' and Jesus' cause - which is to spread the Good News - The Gospel - that belief in Jesus' is the only way to be right with God and have sins forgiven - by His death on the cross - and Jesus is the only way to Heaven - and eternal life with God.

Paul and Timothy are devoted to enabling more and more people to know who Jesus is.

They are Jesus' slaves?

What about us?

Can we say that?

(pause)

The letter is addressed to the **Holy people** in Christ Jesus

Literally saints

Anyone who believes in Jesus' death and resurrection - Paul is saying - can rightly be called saints

So all of us here - believing in Jesus - are saints

Because we are IN Christ Jesus

So when God looks at us - He sees the righteousness - perfection of Jesus - instead of our sin - and so we can be called saints - in Jesus - as we are set apart to be Holy for God

Notice - Paul includes bishops (like our elders - spiritual overseers) and deacons (servants - like our COM)

He includes them to a) highlight the importance of the leadership in the church and b) also to highlight that the congregation and the church leaders are partners in the Gospel

The greeting continues in verse 2

[Powerpoint 4-V2]

With Paul sending grace and peace to the Philippians

Grace is God's underserved favour - the gift from God in sending Jesus to fix sin and death

And peace is not like we would understand peace - it's not the end of wars and conflict in the world - but peace that comes from God - and brings peace between humankind and God - by Jesus fixing the broken relationship between humankind and God - and it's also the promise of everlasting peace in heaven - one day

The Jews have the word "Shalom" for peace - which means peace, harmony, completeness and well-being. This is what Paul means when he wishes the Philippians - *Grace and Peace from God and His Son*. It means Paul wishes completeness in the lives of his church family because of Jesus.

Thankful for the Church of Philippi (vv3-8)

With the greetings out of the way

Paul then goes on to say what he is **thankful** to the church in Philippi in verses 3 to 8

What is Paul thankful for?

[Powerpoint 5a-V3]

See v3 - Even though Paul is in prison - every time he thinks about his church family in Philippi - he has such fond memories of them that he can't help but thank God for his church family

What about us? When we are absent from our church family or when we think about our church family - do we thank God for them?

(pause)

[Powerpoint 5b-V4-5]

Then Paul says in v4 and 5 - he prays with **joy** (there's that word joy again!) - he always prays with joy for his church family

Why?

Because of their partnership - v5

Literally - fellowship, association, community, joint participation

Paul finds it a great joy to be in partnership with his church family - in sharing in faith in Jesus, sharing in fellowship in the Holy Spirit, loving Jesus, loving one another and reaching out to the community of Philippi

What about us?

Can we join with Paul and always pray with **joy** because of our partnership and fellowship in the name of Jesus?

(pause)

Does this partnership bring us joy?

(pause)

Paul's saying it should - because we are a team - and we have the common bond of the Lord Jesus and the unity of the Holy Spirit

(pause)

The thankfulness of this partnership - leads Paul to express confidence in v6 - that God will complete (or perfect or finish) the good work that He started in each one of them until the day that Jesus returns.

[Powerpoint 5c-V6]

That same **confidence** is expressed in our OT reading from Psalm 138

Where King David is confident in this Psalm that God's love is unfailing and God is faithful and His love endures forever

So at the end of the Psalm - King David can confidently say in v8

The LORD will vindicate [literally - deliver me from guilt or suspicion]me;
 your love, LORD, endures forever—
 do not abandon the works of your hands.

Can we claim that same confidence that Paul and King David?

We can - especially when we think of the promises of Jesus and the Father

In John 10:28 - Jesus says this about His sheep who believe in Him

28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand

And the Father promises in Hebrews 13:5

Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you (Deut 31:6)

So this morning [evening] - we can say with confidence - that the good work that God has begun in us - He will complete.

We are W.I.P - and no one can snatch us out of our Good Shepherd - Jesus' hand

(pause)

Paul goes onto say in v7

[Powerpoint 5d-V7]

That he's so thankful for his church family that they are in his **heart**

When someone is in your heart - it is a strong feeling of love - they feel part of you

Paul feels that his church family are part of him

So much so that the partnership he and the church family have in the Gospel of Jesus - is not affected by anything

Not affected by Paul being in chains in prison - because he's still spreading the Gospel even in prison - in fact that's how the church in Philippi started - when the Philippian jailor became a believer in Jesus (Acts 16)

Neither is the partnership in the Gospel affected by him defending the Gospel - if he has to defend the Gospel against false teaching or misunderstanding
 Nor is the partnership in the Gospel affected by him confirming the Gospel - as Paul is doing in this letter - expressing the joy there is in sharing in the Gospel of Jesus together

In fact the partnership in the Gospel that Paul and the Philippians is not affected by him being so far away from them - in prison. Because Paul and them share in the **same grace** that God gave them - when they came to believe in Jesus

As for us - we share in that **same grace** of God

So we are able to share in and advance the Gospel - in every situation we are in too - whether we are confined to bed (due to sickness) or housebound (due to a disability) or whether we are out and about at church or work or uni or school

The same grace of God works in each one of us - and brings with it opportunities - just as it did for Paul in prison

(pause)

[Powerpoint 5e-V8]

Paul is so thankful for his church family - that he says God can be his witness (testify) - just how much he loves them in v8

How much?

With the same **inner affection** that Jesus had for people

Jesus' love and affection for his people was sacrificial - even as far as laying down his life for them -

And the word affection - here means inner affection - literally from your bowels -

The love is so strong it gives you a gut ache

Some of us may have experienced that gut ache in our human relationships?

Paul literally loves his church family from his bowels - his guts?

Can we say we love our church family - from deep within our bowels?

Jesus can? Paul can?

What about us?

(pause)

[Illustration]

My mum and dad aren't alive anymore - but I have many mums and dads here at St. David's - and I love you dearly

Also - I'm an only child - but I have many brothers and sisters here - and I love you all dearly too

I cry with you, I rejoice with you, I laugh with you, I pray with you, I have fun with you, your concerns are my concerns, your worries are my worries

And I feel that love is reciprocated

Can we say we love our church family - from deep within our bowels?

(pause)

Paul's prayer for the Church of Philippi (vv9-11)

So with all that thankfulness and joy in his heart

Paul begins a short prayer for his church family in verses 9 to 11

[Powerpoint 6a-V9]

He prays that the church family's **love will increase in such abundance** - because they will have increased **knowledge** and **insight**

Paul's not talking about general knowledge here

General knowledge will not always enable us to love God and others more

Paul's talking about their knowledge of God and Jesus increasing

That will then lead to loving more and having a better and deeper insight - into how to live lives that please God

How can we increase in our knowledge of God and Jesus?

Through His Word - studying, reading and meditating on it...

Through fellowship in the Word and Spirit together - Iron sharpens iron!

This will lead to the next part of Paul's prayer in v10

[Powerpoint 6b-V10]

Paul prays that this increased love and knowledge of God

Will lead to discerning what is best - that is - making wise and godly choices - which in turn will lead to people becoming pure and blameless for when Jesus comes back

And those wise and godly choices will lead to the next part of Paul's prayer in v11

[Powerpoint 6c-V11]

It will lead to spiritual fruit - the fruit that comes from the righteousness of Jesus - as they grow and become more like Jesus - that's Paul's prayer for his church family to become more like Jesus

Which goes back to what he said in verse 6 - that he is confident that the good work that God had begun in them - God will complete.

How can we be more like Jesus?

Answer - By being the obedient Christian in action - like our wheel - Jesus at the Hub

Vertical spokes of: Prayer and God's word

Horizontal spokes of: fellowship and witnessing

All this Paul says brings glory and praise to God

So it's worth asking ourselves this question this morning [evening]

'Are our lives - what we do, think or say - truly bringing glory and praise to God? Do people say to us - wow - glory and praise to God for **you** in our church family?'

If not - what do we need to change about ourselves to bring glory and praise to God?

(pause)

Conclusion/Challenge

So to finish up then

I'd like us to ask ourselves this morning [evening]

Can we pray for each member of our family to:

to love in abundance?

to grow in knowledge and insight of God and His Son?

to become more like Jesus in righteousness - and be an obedient Christian in action?

And I'd like to leave us with a challenge this morning [evening]

Can we pray for our church family like the Apostle Paul does?

So let's write our own prayer - share it with our family, our growth group and our minister.

If we don't know how to pray...

I've included some *prayers for our church family from our church family* in the bulletin - and I'm happy to include more - if you send/email/give them to me

This is a **call to prayer** for our church family - which will lead to us - to be thankful to God for our church family, to be loving Jesus more and to be loving others with the love of Jesus more. Let's pray...