

July 12, 2009
Pentecost 6
Philippians Sermon Series

“Rejoicing Together in the Blessings of the Gospel”

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God.

Her name was Margaret. Her body was like a pin cushion and bore the scars of multiple major surgeries. I was privileged to have a devotion and prayer with her after her major back surgery. She was in intense pain. She kept her eyes closed as we read a few verses of Scripture and then prayed with her. We said goodbye and began walking away. Then there was the faint call: "Pastor... Pastor." I came back and she said softly, "I am praying for you that you might find a nice wife." Fighting a large lump in the throat and even a tear, I wondered how someone could be thinking of me more than she thought about her own pain and problems.

Imagine how emotional it must have been to gather with other Christians living in Philippi and to hear the letter from Paul read for the first time. It was a letter written from Rome where he was under house arrest for faithfully witnessing to Jesus and his resurrection from the dead. No whining. No complaining. He tells these dear Christians how much he loved them and shares the joy that they had together in the Lord.

Has anything recently been robbing you of your joy in the Lord? Then it will help us to spend time together in this letter of Paul to the Philippians written while he was a prisoner in Rome. It has been called the letter of joy with its stirring words at the end of the letter, "Rejoice in the Lord always and again and I say rejoice!" If you know the gospel and you know what your heavenly Father has done to save and rescue you through his Son, you can rejoice every day in your blessings and you can share your joy with other Christians throughout the world.

We appreciate the love that saved us

Paul writes to the Christians in Philippi and calls them saints. "Paul and Timothy, servants

of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons." I was once changing airplanes in Las Vegas. On board were several famous football players from the past who had come to Vegas to make money by signing autographs. As I was about to take my seat, a booming voice behind, that of the infamous Green Bay linebacker Ray Nitchke, said, "Do you know young man that you are sitting next to a living legend?" There was a former star for the Cleveland Browns. Look at the person sitting next to you. You are sitting next to a saint, a living legend, a fellow believer, washed in Jesus blood.

Look at Paul. He writes this letter and the chains rattle every time he moves. Roman soldiers are nearby. See joy on his face as he thinks of these precious saints he has come to know, who believe with all their hearts as Paul did that they were rescued from eternal death by Jesus who died and rose again for them. How close he felt to them and how often he prayed for them as he writes: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." He prayed for all of them, all of the time, always giving thanks with joy because of what they shared together in faith. They shared a partnership in the gospel.

In that congregation was a woman named Lydia, a wealthy woman, whom Paul met one day as she was praying with others along the river. It says of her in Acts 16, "The Lord opened her heart to believe." In that group was the jailor who asked Paul late one night, "What must I do to be saved?" In the early hours of the morning the jailor heard the good news that there was nothing he could do to save himself. Jesus had done it all for him. He was baptized along with the members of his household.

This morning I want to illustrate what it means that we are partners in the gospel by showing you this light bulb. If I take it and break it with a hammer, as I have done with this bulb in this plastic bag, there is no way we could put it back together again. So it is with your life and mine. Sin destroys our relationship with God, makes us unfit for eternal life, and there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Someone can praise us at our funeral for showing love to other people, but there is no hope in us, because we fall short of the glory of God. God gives us salvation in Jesus, restores us to perfection, even though we are far perfect. He declares us righteous as we are told later in this letter, "That I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ."

Paul thinks of these people as he writes. He knows the Lord is not done doing great things for his kingdom through their lives. "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." When the Lord brings people into the message of the gospel and creates faith in their hearts to believe, he does not quit on them and ignore them. If you have a plant you are trying to grow, you know how it needs water, and sunlight, some fertilizer and tender care. Paul assures these people that the Lord who begun something good in them will carry it to completion.

Our forgiveness is complete and finished and paid for. There is nothing left to make ourselves worthy of God's love. Yet, there is one part of our lives that is not yet full and complete, and that is all the opportunities to show our love to God and to each other out of love for how the Lord has rescued us and saved us. There are so many opportunities left

for us and that's what makes each day of life on this tremendously exciting.

A famous artist was starting a new painting when a friend dropped in for a visit. The artist was just starting to lay down the first brush strokes on a large piece of canvass. The friend could only see dabs of paint here and there, but the artists began to explain the scene in vivid detail. The Lord has already made you his child, but now he wants to carry out to completion the work he has started. He wants to use your life, painting in the various scenes which will bring glory to his name and glory to you. It is the Lord who carries out this work. That is what brought such joy to Paul.

Have you ever watched a lineman climb up a pole to repair an electric line or telephone line? He puts on special shoes with sharp spikes on them to dig into the pole. Then he puts a belt around the pole and his waist. By leaning back with his full weight on the belt, he can dig in and climb up the pole. Christians lean back on Jesus trusting in him for eternal life, and also trusting he will help us complete our lives to the glory of His name.

How close was Paul to these dear Christians in Philippi? A young, popular country singer can sing about tears on her guitar. Paul could write about tears on his manuscript as he bears witness to how much he misses these people with these words, "God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus." In the book of Acts there is the touching story of a woman who died. Her name was Tabitha or Dorcas. People came together and showed all the clothes that she had made for them. They celebrated together the love she had shown to them.

In a far grander way Christians stay in contact with each other and stay close to each other to celebrate they affection they have in Christ Jesus and the love he has for them. We celebrate with hymns such as we just sung, "Before the throne of God above I have a strong, a perfect plea: a great High Priest, whose name is Love, who ever lives and pleads for me. My name is graven on his hands, my name is written on his heart; I know that while in heaven he stands no tongue can bid me thence depart." You are like this broken light bulb that has been restored so you can rejoice with other Christians that you can let your light shine for the Lord.

2. We want to see more of the loved that saved us

When you are feeding a little baby and you give him some new food he has never tasted before and he loves it, the baby always wants more, and may even cry to get more. As Christians we can never get enough of just how much God has loved us when we did not deserve his love. Jesus said in John 10, "I have come that they might have life and have it to the full."

Paul wants more of God's love to develop and grow in the lives of these people he loved. "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God." He prays that their love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight. He wants them to see and know and love even more the love their Lord has for them. He wants it to abound. The Greek word literally

means to bubble up and flow all over the place. He wants God's amazing love to be like a huge spring flowing up out of the ground from the knowledge and depth of insight that comes through the Word of God.

When this love flows up into our lives through the Word of God, it allows us to discern what is best and be pure and blameless. The New King James Version reads this way: "That you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ." As you grow in God's Word and appreciate his love you will be able to approve things that are excellent. You will read Christian books and sing hymns and say, "That is excellent" because it is taking attention from me and pointing me to Christ. It says that you will be sincere. The Greek word means tested by the sun. Hold a twenty dollar bill up to the sun and you can spot a counterfeit. The English word for sincere comes from the Latin and it means without wax. In ancient times, dishonest potters would put wax into the cracked pots to hide their imperfections. To be sincere is to be without wax. Whenever human love becomes more important than God's love for us, we spot a fake, a counterfeit.

Paul prays that their lives might be filled with fruits of righteousness out of love for Christ and that they might be found blameless on the judgment day. This peach almost looks perfect but it is not. Look at the fruit you bear in your life for Jesus. It is certainly far from perfect, but we know it will be perfect on the judgment day because of Jesus. What a privilege it is for us to rejoice together in these blessings of the gospel. Amen.