

Joyful Partnership in the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Awesome. I'm excited to be in front of you tonight because Sean has let me preach the first message from our book in Philippians.

We've been going through Proverbs. That's been a joy and a help in learning about wisdom. And now we are moving into Philippians.

So, my prayer is that I do well with God's Word for your encouragement and your growth.

Let's pray before we get started. Lord, I pray for your help as I preach tonight.

And Lord, I pray for our church as we get to hear from your Word. As we break into Philippians. Just a small passage tonight.

[1 : 09] But Lord, I pray that you would encourage us. I pray that we would see more of your glory and your goodness. Lord, I pray that you would whet the appetite of everyone so that they would come back.

So that as we take this journey through Philippians, we would grow together in joy in our partnership of the gospel for your glory.

God, work your Word into our life. And help us to work out our own selfishness.

And all the things that we pull in. All of our sin. Lord, forgive us. And make us more Christ-like for you. We pray these things in your glorious name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. There's a lot to talk about. So I'm going to try to move through it quickly.

Although we're not covering a big passage.

[2 : 12] I just feel like there's a lot. So if I missed something that you wanted me to talk about, bring it up with your community group and discuss it that way.

And I'll apologize in advance. But Philippians, the theme that we have chosen to put on Philippians is a joyful partnership in the gospel.

And our passage this evening is just the first 11 verses of this book. And if we had to put a title on it, it would be the same thing. Joyful partnership in the gospel.

So since that's the case, I would like to take, and since this is the first message of this book, I would like to take that theme. And just talk about each word real briefly because I think it's helpful for us as we spend the next two months or so looking at Philippians.

Joyful partnership in the gospel. That phrase needs all of the words. And if we leave any of those words or the concepts out of the message, it leaves us lacking.

[3 : 23] It becomes less than what God intended it to be. All right, so let's start with joyful. If we take out joyful, we're left with something that doesn't satisfy.

We're left with a job or a purpose that is just dry and empty. Lifeless. Not empty, but lifeless. You end up with a gospel that doesn't line up with the good news.

All right? We move to partnership. If we take partnership out, we have a pretty lonely mission. A joyful gospel is great for an individual, but if there is no partnership, it falls short.

See, God's building a church, a people, for his own self, for his own glory. So we need the partnership. It isn't aloneness. It isn't, if it's not together for the gospel, it becomes alone for the gospel.

And there's no encouragement in that. And churches become weak and individualistic. And I think we see that in a lot of churches today, if we're not careful.

[4 : 30] The other word in that phrase is gospel. Take that out and you're left with a joyful partnership. That's nice, but there's no depth.

There's no lasting foundation in that partnership. It's service. It's a relationship. And it will satisfy maybe for a time, but if you take God out of it, you're left empty in the end.

I was thinking of the Christmas song, Joy to the World. There's meaning behind those words, joy to the world. The joy that came wasn't just a nice child in a manger that made Christmas season really nice and feel good, but it was lasting, eternal joy that was coming to the world for our salvation. He came for us. He knew there was nothing in this world that could satisfy us except himself. So he made a way for himself to be known and to find that satisfaction.

A lasting, a real joy through Jesus Christ. So let me ask you something tonight as we begin.

[5 : 54] What words in that short theme, joyful partnership in the gospel, connect with you?

What words in there connect with you? And which ones might be missing in your life? Are you missing joy? Are you missing partnership? Are you missing Jesus in the gospel?

Let me encourage you. If you are, you've come to the right place. Because over the next, like I said, two months or so, as we move through Philippians as a church, I want to encourage you to stay with us.

Because this theme will grow and continue. And each one of those words we're going to build upon and see the fullness of this joyful participation in the gospel.

So whether you know Jesus tonight or not, what we're going to learn from Philippians can change your life. And if we've learned anything from this year, it is that we have no control over anything.

[7 : 11] We know that things can change instantly. There's nothing in this world that is going to bring us joy and satisfaction. Nothing. Nothing. Now you cannot believe me and you could waste the rest of your life trying to find those things, but in the end it will leave you empty.

Or you can go after that which God has for you and you can live with a satisfaction and joy that nothing can take away. That's Philippians.

That's what we get to jump into for the next little bit. Philippians is seen as the happiest book in the Bible, yet it is written by Paul while he's in prison.

That's fantastic. Who better could write about joy than Paul? Possessions and obviously circumstances did not bring him joy.

Only Christ brought him joy. All right, that's our intro. Let's dig into Philippians. Just a quick background of Philippians.

[8 : 24] Written by Paul around 62 AD. So we're talking about roughly 30 years after the death of Jesus Christ, after his resurrection and he goes back to heaven.

Paul's in prison in Rome. And this book was written while in prison. It was written as a thank you note to the church in Philippi for their support, basically for a monetary gift that was sent to Paul while he was in prison.

So Paul writes this thank you letter, but it's not just a thank you letter. It's meant to be a letter of encouragement. And we'll look into the encouragement part shortly.

But it's helpful to realize that this letter is different than all of Paul's other letters. See, there's no correction or discipline in this book.

It's just encouragement. So we see something special in the church of Philippi. We see something special in the relationship between Paul and the people in the church of Philippi.

[9 : 35] So be encouraged that we're digging into a book that hopefully doesn't leave you feeling like I can't do enough. There's more I need to be doing.

But hear Philippians as an encouragement for who we are in Jesus Christ. As we go through these 11 verses, actually, let me just, let me read the passage first and then we'll talk about this section. So Philippians 1, verses 1 through 11. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who were 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 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 Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you because I hold you in my heart.

[10 : 47] For you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how 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 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.

As we move through these 11 verses, we're going to see three sections that we're going to work out of. The greeting, the grounding, and the goal. So let's look at how this letter starts out.

Now we know that Paul has lots of reasons why he can start out with a letter like this. Paul, leader and church planter, along with Timothy, my young pastor in training, we write to you, but he doesn't do that.

We know that Paul's heritage and his training, his direct calling by God, his leadership, his persecution. All these things give him this ability to boast, but instead we find Paul giving this great example of humility right from the beginning.

[12:07] He says, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. We're who's writing to you, servants of Christ Jesus. And then how does he address the people at the church of Philippi?

Again, it could be, I'm writing this to the pastors and the elders. Can you preach this or pass it on to your people? No, there's this partnership of all equalness that is happening here.

He says to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi. He's not favoring out the more spiritually mature or the most gifted or those who serve the most.

He addresses the saints. They are saints not because they are perfect, but because they are in Christ. That is, they have put their faith and trust in Jesus.

They are the saints. And then he says with the overseers and the deacons. The word overseers is, Paul uses elsewhere and it's synonymous with elder or bishop.

[13:26] So by him adding these words, we're able to see that this church of Philippi that he started actually is large enough to have governance and structure to it.

leadership. That's encouraging to hear. And we look at verse 2. Verse 2 is Paul's greeting to the church.

He says, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We've seen this a lot because Paul uses this greeting in all of his letters with very little variation.

So it's easy for us to miss it. But this isn't just a fluffy greeting, not meant to be just a nice, Hey, how you doing? Sorry to hear your football team's not doing well this year.

How's the weather? He's not starting out like that. Paul writes a greeting that is meant to encourage and give hope. And that's the greeting that Paul uses for all of his letters.

[14:37] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. What is he saying by that? Paul is calling down grace and peace from God and the Lord Jesus Christ to the Philippians.

That is, he expects grace and peace from God to the readers of this letter. He says that this because God has shown us grace.

Each and every one of us, God has shown grace. And because of that, because of who God is, we have an unshakable peace available through Jesus Christ.

Paul wants us to be reminded of this so he starts out his letter this way. That is his blessing. A proclaiming of a promise.

A reminder of what is available to them in God and the Lord Jesus Christ. So, that's the first section.

[15:48] The second section, that was the greeting. The second section we're going to look at is the grounding. What do we mean by that? Let's read verses three through five. I thank my God in all my 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.

I say grounding because we're looking at what grounds Paul in what he is saying to the Philippians because the Philippians don't want to hear just niceties.

They want to know that it's grounded in something. And I would hope we would want the same thing. Don't preach something that just sounds nice but we want it grounded in truth. We want it grounded in the word of God.

When you talk about joy that's real, that we can live for, I want it to have depth and meaning that we can go after. That's the grounding that Paul wants to give us.

So to phrase that section a little different, Paul says, I'm thankful to God for all of you. All of you guys that have brought me so much joy.

[17:06] In all of my prayers for you, I just have joy. Every time I think about you and I pray for you, I'm just filled with joy.

And for that, I'm just thankful. But why? Why is Paul thankful for the church of Philippi? Why does thinking about them bring him joy?

Verse 5 says, because of the partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. in Philippians, Paul uses this gospel partnership to refer to a gospel-centered friendship and the gospel mission. So, as we move through Philippians and as we see that picture of joyful partnership in the gospel, it's important that we see both aspects of that.

The friendship, and we see that with this church in Philippi, and the mission. They were on a mission together. He says, partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

[18 : 21] to get an accurate understanding of what that means from the first day until now, I think it's helpful that we see what he's talking about.

Paul has this affection of this church, and he says, from the first day until now. So, I think we need a little bit of background on the church of Philippi, which Paul started. Okay?

So, let's jump back just a little bit. A hundred years, Philippi is established as a Roman colony. It's governed by Roman law. Its citizens were Roman citizens.

Philippi itself was modeled after Rome as a miniature Rome. Even its style and architecture was laid out to match that of Rome.

And this is the city where Paul finds himself because God directs him and he starts his first church. How did he get there? Actually, he got there from a few failures.

[19 : 24] Paul's goal was to minister in Asia, in Bithynia. Only God closes those doors and he points them towards Philippi.

You can read more about it in Acts chapter 16. For the sake of time, I just want to summarize it up for you so we get an idea of what this church is, what it looks like and where it is when Paul is in prison.

So, Paul and a small team, evangelistic team, on a mission, they arrive at Philippi. There's no synagogue in Philippi so Paul finds a women's prayer meeting down by the river.

See, in order to have a synagogue, there must be ten or more Jewish men in a city and then a synagogue can be established. Obviously, there's not enough there so there's women praying down by the river.

The kingdom of God is about to break open on European soil for the first time and it starts with women humbly praying down by the river.

[20 : 36] Prayer is powerful and it's important. So, I'm going to take a minute since we're here to talk about prayer and its importance because I think we need it right now.

Are you feeling disconnected? Are you feeling like nothing's happening inside spiritually? then I want to encourage you to check your prayer life because there's life that God has for us if we keep that communication open with Him.

When we close that and we seek life elsewhere then it fails us and we really see that now because of the time that we're in.

God uses this little humble prayer meeting down by the river to start a church in Philippi to give us this letter to encourage us.

That's what came out of the little prayer meeting. I'll admit I haven't gone to prayer meeting very much in a while but I want to encourage you to try it if you have time in your schedule to do it.

[22 : 07] It's easier now because we're quarantined because we're locked up because we can't meet together and let me while we're talking about it let me push aside any temptation of thoughts that Satan puts into your mind about how you can't come because I have to get dressed up well you don't have to get dressed up it's available online so it's easy to connect to you don't have to pray and I say that because I don't want you to stay where you don't pray but at the same time there's more you get from a prayer meeting by being there and hearing the saints praying than you do by not coming at all is it difficult yes is it hard to sing songs over zoom yeah it is but it's there and it's a church on a mission trying to stay grounded in the word of

God and encourage one another so I want to encourage you to try to make it put a picture up if you don't want them to see your living room mute it if there's noise in the background if you have to run and eat dinner while you're on it that's okay what I'm saying is Satan wants to give you every opportunity not to connect to the church because he doesn't want you connected to the church prayer prayer is important and Satan knows it okay so prayer meeting down by the river Paul seeks out Lydia Lydia is a prominent woman who sells purple cloth she is a God fearer which means she worshiped God she knew about God but she doesn't know what it means to be a Christian Paul starts to teach her and it says that God opened her heart and mind to

believe the gospel Lydia gets saved her house gets saved next we see Paul out of frustration he casts a spirit out of a young woman because she seems like she's just annoying his preaching of the gospel so he casts out a spirit only that upsets the owners of this young lady because they were profiting off of her because she was fortune telling there's something there about fortune telling and the spirit that made that possible just throw that out there for those who struggle with that or are tempted to know about those things anyway he upsets the owners and for that reason Paul and Silas get thrown into jail not the ideal place to have church and yet Paul and Silas are singing and praying in this prison note another connection there they're having their own little prayer meeting and an earthquake breaks out jail doors are open chains fall off all the prisoners the guard is about to kill himself because he thinks they're all going to make safe and Paul says hold up let me comfort you with the fact that all of us are still here and what does the prisoner do he breaks and says what do I have to do to be saved that's how the church of Philippi started those are the first converts of this church that's roughly ten years before Philippians is written that's the history of their partnership there were others that came to

Christ there's more in that and we'll learn more about that when we jump into Acts but they're on mission with him there's there is genuine love for one another this connection between this work that got started in Philippi their work for the Lord and this mission of sharing the gospel that's the partnership Paul is talking about look at verse 6 he says I am sure of this speaking of God here he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ Paul's confidence is in their partnership or Paul's confidence in their partnership is not an empty confidence it's a confidence in God knowing that God is behind it and God will continue it see what God starts God finishes if God calls a person and saves them he doesn't let it go and drop it off but he continues that work to completion we are active in that relationship with

[27 : 38] God it isn't that we don't do anything but it is God who supplies what we need spiritually emotionally physically God provides and directs that so that in the end we would be complete and perfect like Christ not complete now but at the day of Jesus Christ verse 7 he says it is right for me to feel this way about you because I hold you in my heart for you are all partakers with me of grace both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel Paul is grounded in the fact that they are partakers of grace with him in his imprisonment in his sharing of the gospel and his defending the gospel Paul is grounded in the fact they are partakers what does that mean that they are partakers the grace of

God that is sustaining and protecting and securing and holding Paul they are sharers of the church of Philippi is connected to Paul so what sustains Paul is what is sustaining them that trust that Paul has is the trust that they hold on and lean to the God that that is moving Paul along wherever he is is what is moving the church along with him so instead of giving up on Paul when he is sent to prison because as you can imagine there's shame that comes along with being sent to prison I don't quite know what it would be like at this time but it feels like it would be that way now when someone is sent to jail there's shame that goes along with that and so when the planter of your church is sent to prison there is obviously some shame that can accompany that that had no effect not on them they were on mission with

Paul they knew why Paul was in jail and they supported him through it verse 8 Paul here is calling God as a witness in order to bring emphasis and truth to what he is saying the new living translation says this God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus Paul says I yearn for you this is not an earthly based on my feelings yearning this is a spiritual yearning one with an affection that comes from Jesus Christ see they are all in Christ they belong to Christ they have been found and saved by Christ so that affection is from Christ Paul is imitating Christ and how he has affection for others who are in Christ are you it's a little confusing but are you seeing the connection there Paul is imitating Christ and how he has affection for others who are in Christ and Paul has this affection for all the saints in the church at Philippi he says so back in the beginning if we are united to others in Christ like what Paul is talking about do we church have a similar affection for them does our spiritual affections which come from Christ imitate his affections for his followers you see the connection definitely an area that I can grow in I'm sure others can grow in they're of Christ do I do I care for them do I love them like Christ loved them so what is Paul's grounding or foundation for this letter of encouragement it's their willful and joyful partnership with Paul in the gospel our last section is the goal verses 9 through 11 cover that what's Paul's goal in verses 9 through 11 or rather we'll see the goal in 9 through 11

about what his goal is for this passage as well as the book of Philippians Paul's goal let's read verse 9 I don't want you to hear what

[33 : 16] I think Paul's goal is I want you to see what the word of God says is Paul's goal verse 9 and it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment that was Paul's goal and it's going to build for these next three verses that their love would abound more and more there are two things going on here again Paul is encouraging them to increase their love and we'll speak to that in a minute but secondly at the same time he is showing them the importance of prayer see Paul is separated from the church that he started he didn't leave to go on mission to do other things but he is now in prison and he can't leave prison to go visit them it's a church that he loves very much and yet he can't go see them not them or any church while there's no pandemic going on it is if he is in quarantine unable to go to church unable to sing and worship and hear the word from any other church and what do we see

Paul doing he prays for them we see Paul praying for them and encouraging them that's what he does so what do we do for others in our church do we pray for them are our prayers mostly if we have time to pray consumed with our needs we do have needs I'm not saying don't pray for those but do we pray for our church that we should be on mission the gospel with all right so let's go back to the first section we saw we see prayer going on there but the big part is the encouraging the encouragement for them to increase their love he's praying that their love would grow and abound more and more but also realize he's not just talking about growing with no direction and no no limits just aimlessly growing in love we all just love each other no he's specific in saying with knowledge and all discernment as

I hear that knowledge and all discernment I'm reminded of wisdom and what we just went through in Proverbs he wants us to abound in our love using wisdom why pray for love to abound more and more Paul verse 10 so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ that's why he prays for our love to abound so that we may approve that is that we would accept or agree with what is excellent now in order to approve what is excellent we have to know what excellence is so there needs to be some knowledge of that not just knowledge as in facts but experience see as we learn to live like

Christ we learn to love others more excellent because we all know that sometimes when we love others it's mixed with sin and sometimes we say things or do things that don't come out right they mess things up but we don't turn and stop loving we just fix what we did we work it out we talk to that brother that sister and we move on because we're called to love them and to grow in that and we can't become more excellent in our love unless we keep doing it and learning from the mistakes that we make and we will make mistakes stupid and not or to not cause offense.

So that's why we want to grow in our love and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. It is important to remind us again, because we often get wrapped up in the world, but Christ is coming back.

[38 : 25] We need to be living in that truth, because we need to reorder our priorities at times in light of the knowledge that God is coming back for his church, for his people.

Jesus gives us a parable about this that is helpful in Matthew 25. I'm not going to read it. It's a marriage scene. The groom is coming, and everything is being ready. Everything is being done. Everything is being scheduled and set up for that big event. The groom will arrive, and there will be a marriage and a celebration. For that to happen, things have to be in place.

Plans have to be made. Schedules have to be set up. Priorities set, maybe readjusted. And for those who are not prepared, they're left out.

And Jesus' parable is talking about those who don't prepare and are left out and are not part of the kingdom of God and are left behind. So we look towards the day of Christ, and we plan for that.

[39 : 41] We look forward to being made complete and whole and perfect when we see Jesus' face. perfecting our love for others as that day draws near.

That's what Paul wants to encourage us to do. But wait, Paul is not done with this goal that he has so we can grow in our love wisely, so we can approve what is excellent, so we can move towards being pure and blameless before Christ.

In verse 11, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. Paul's talking about having righteous fruit.

That is, fruit of the Spirit that grows from our relationship with Jesus. Galatians chapter 5 talks about all the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace.

Those things don't grow outside of a relationship with Jesus. They grow as a result of the Spirit's work inside of us.

[41 : 09] Paul doesn't want to just leave us here thinking all these things are things we have to do on our own power. Living towards purity, growing in righteousness, our love abounding, becoming more perfect.

These things are not of us. We play an active part in pursuing those things, but it comes through Jesus Christ.

We aren't to do it on our own strength because we're going to mess it up. We're to do it through the power of the Holy Spirit. Lastly, Paul brings us to the very end of verse 11, the ultimate goal, to the glory and praise of God.

Paul ends his prayer in thanksgiving with this reason, that God may be glorified. There is no purpose.

There is no goal in life higher than glorifying God. We don't glorify God so that we can do something else or so that we can get something.

[42 : 26] That is the end goal of all things is to glorify God. This lines up with Paul's, he has a few other similar prayers.

One is in 2 Thessalonians. He says, To this end, we always pray for you that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you and you in him according to the grace of our God.

This also lines up with what Jesus taught. Remember how Jesus taught his disciples to pray in Matthew. He says, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

God our Father is to be honored as holy and set apart. Also, Jesus says this in John 15, 8, By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so be proved to be my disciples.

The end, the goal of it all is to glorify God. So in summary, Paul is praying that the church would grow in love and wisdom, that they would be pure and blameless and bear fruit for the glory of God.

[43 : 59] As we spend the next two months or so in Philippians, I want to encourage you to look to Christ. Study Paul, one of the most joyful people in the Bible and yet one of the most persecuted.

Hear what God has to say and see how he works through Paul as we study this book. I had this thought while I was preparing the message.

If we could think of the journey, our journey through Philippians as a picture that is being painted. A painting of that theme, joyful partnership in the gospel.

what that painting looks like describes what that partnership looks like in your life. You see where I'm going with this?

So there's a picture that as we walk through Philippians, I want you to allow the word of God to start to paint that picture, that description of that partnership in your life.

[45 : 11] Now that's going to look different for different people. For some of us, that painting right now is blank.

For some of us, that painting might be very colorful. For some of us, that painting might be dark and lonely. For some of us, maybe there's some missing parts.

Maybe it's hard to tell what color that used to be in that area. of our joyful partnership in the gospel. But I want you to be encouraged.

I don't want you to leave the painting there. Because from now until when Jesus comes back, that painting of that joyful partnership in the gospel can always be progressing and made more beautiful.

So let's allow God to work through this book, this book of Philippians as we study it, and let's allow him to paint for us what that picture should look like as we are growing in that partnership.

[46 : 25] Brightening the spots that are hindering joy. Putting new color over the faded hues of discontentment.

Maybe filling in the white areas that are empty with self-centeredness and worldliness. I don't say this to condemn, I say this because there's hope to be found in Philippians, in Christ, as we are in joyful partnership from the gospel.

the goal when we're done Philippians is that we would have this beautiful picture of joyful partnership in the gospel that God has painted for our lives.

It's for our joy and it's for God's glory. Take a moment just to think about that quietly and then we'll have a time a prayer.