

Well, hello and welcome to our new series on Philippians. Over the next few months, we're going to be studying the letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi.

And having only last week, completed our series on 2 Corinthians, we're going to be struck by how very different **this** letter is....

Throughout the letters to the Corinthians, Paul was dealing with a church who **he** loved greatly, but many of them had rejected him... And in those letters, we could see a lot of hurt in Paul... We're not going to see any of that here – in fact, it's quite the opposite...

In this letter to the Philippians, he's giving thanks to God:

- for the Philippian church;
- for their support; and
- for their partnership...

Righto, so what do we know about Philippi?

Well, Philippi, was a city in North Eastern Greece. Formerly known as “Crenides”, but it had a name-change in 356BC, when King Philip II of Macedon decided to name it after himself (father of Alexander the Great). And the reason this city was important to Philip, was he fortified it, and turned it into a garrison, to enable him to first of all conquer, and then defend some nearby gold mines...

But by the time of Paul, Philippi had been swallowed by the enormous Roman Empire, and its culture had become quite thoroughly Roman...

And apparently, although it wasn't the capital of the region, Philippi was one of the leading cities and one of the stop-over points on one of their military highways (map marked in Red).

But, why was Philippi, so close to **Paul's** heart? Well, Philippi, was the first major centre in Europe, where Paul had preached the Gospel. And the Lord had given Paul a very specific spiritual direction to be there... {Map from our series on Acts 16. – Thick Red Arrows = 2nd Missionary Journey}

- Paul & Silas started at Antioch
- Visited a number of churches that Paul had planted on his first trip;
- In Lystra, they picked up Timothy (he joined them on their journey);
- Then, when they got to Phrygia and Galatia, they were going to go into Asia (Turkey), but the Holy Spirit said, "No, don't go there..."
- And then when they got to Mysia, they were going to head into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.
- And so they continued on to Troas.
- And it was at Troaz, that Paul had a vision in the night.

Acts 16:⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought

to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

- And they found their way to Philippi (the main city in the region).
- And that's where they preached the Gospel, and that's where they planted a church.

Hmm. When I read that story, I go all goose-bumpy, remembering times when God has given us Spiritual prompting and direction, and we know that it's been from God...

You see, when God gives a word/dream/vision, I want you to understand, that it's not for a nice little devotional thought – it gives us an assurance of call..

E.G. when Bush Disciples first began, the way that the Lord revealed it to us, and the way that it was confirmed through other people – it was something that only God can do... And so, we knew for sure, that this was a direction of God... And because of this certainty, through all of the tough times,, We've never considered abandoning this call...

And we know, that if/when the Lord wants us to move on, He will reveal that to us, in a method that is just as certain, as when He established this ministry...

And some of you will have experienced something similar... When circumstances have happened, and it's been something

that only God can do, and so you've had the certainty – this is God's will – this is where God wants me, and this is how God wants me serving...

And, if you've experienced that, you will understand, the very special place that this church in Philippi had in Paul's heart... It's similar, to the place that **you** hold in **our** heart...

Alright, Paul's connection with the church in Philippi:

- The first church he planted in Europe;
- And his arrival in Philippi, was by no accident.
- At the time, He was in exactly the place, where the Holy Spirit wanted him to be.

Righto, Let's get to the letter itself. If we don't start now, we're not going to get very far into it.

Paul (BTW), is writing this letter from prison. And we'll see that later on.

1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi,
with the overseers and deacons:

From that one verse, we learn a lot about ourselves, and about who we are in Christ... When some people talk about "our identity in Christ", they try to build us up, and boost our egos, about how important we are... But then there's other people,

who want to shame us, and to get us to focus on how lowly we are... But here, in this one verse, we get a **true** picture of who we are in Christ... And there's 2 facets to it...

Now, Paul and Timothy – I reckon they would've been Spiritual heroes to the Philippians... (Well, not to all the Philippians – the towns-people and the magistrates, had P&Silas beaten and thrown in prison) It was in Philippi (BTW), where Paul and Silas were in jail and singing hymns to God, where the Earthquake hit, and when the Jailer thought his prisoners had escaped, he was about to suicide, and Paul stopped him, and the jailer and his family became Christians... If you don't know the story, read Acts 16... Wonderful, wonderful stuff...

But to the **church** in Philippi:

- they'd seen all this miraculous stuff happening;
- They'd witnessed Paul's faithfulness – and his willingness to be incarcerated for Jesus;
- They'd seen the activity of God, (earthquake) in the transformation of the Jailer & his whole family

In their eyes, Paul and Timothy, would've had-to-of been spiritual heroes ...

But how does Paul describe himself? As **servants of Christ Jesus**

Now, some people (even in one commentary that I read), they try to downplay, what this word "Servant" means.. In the original Greek, δούλοι (douloi) (bond servant – slave)... And some people try to tell us, that a "Doulos" was a

privileged position... Not it wasn't... A slave is exactly as it sounds – “a bonded servant”...

Slave/bond-servant/doulos, was bound to serve their master... The master would come home and put his feet up, and the slave-servant, was **compelled** to serve their master. If they didn't enjoy their job, they weren't free to go and look for another one with better working conditions... They didn't have that right. They were a slave.

Let's shake off any illusion we have, that a bond-servant is a title of honour. And Paul sees himself as a bond-servant of Christ – as a slave of Christ... In fact, it's one of his favourite descriptions of himself (Bondservant – a Slave of Jesus Christ)...

But even though the word itself, describes a very lowly station in life, I have no doubt that for Paul, as for you and I, It is the most wonderful, high privilege, to be a slave-servant of Christ...

And this is our proper attitude – How could we ever compare to the Apostle Paul, and yet, he was a slave for Jesus... And we are too – and what a privilege it is, to be a slave for Jesus.... Alright, so that's one facet of who we are in Christ...

The second facet is, “We are **saints**”.

He addressed this letter: To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

And some of us might be thinking, well, if I was at Philippi, he wouldn't be writing to me – I'm no saint... And if you know me, you'd probably say, "He's no saint."...

But, do we understand, what a saint really is? I don't mean "Saint" as defined by the Roman Catholic Church; I don't mean "Saint" as understood by the world...

Biblically, what is a saint??? The Greek word is ἅγιοις (hagiois) Which means "Holy one"... A Saint, is someone who is holy. But, we don't become saints by doing good things; And we don't become saints by doing a miracle in Jesus' Name, or by being "canonized"...

We become saints, by the grace of God.. The key to this is the address. **To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi**

They happen to be at Philippi, but what's their address? Their address, is **in** Christ.

I don't want to ever hear any Christian saying "I'm no saint"... Because that's faithlessness to the extreme... In fact, I think some people wear that as some kind of badge-of-honour "I'm no saint"... And they think that, "If I can give the impression that I'm no saint, I can connect better with a sinful world (more relevant)... What a load of rot. That's faithlessness..

Because, if I am **in Christ**, a saint, is exactly what I am. If you are in Christ, a saint is exactly what you are...

No matter how imperfect we are; No matter how unfinished God's transformational work seems to be (in us),,, we are saints...

We are saints, because **this**, is the power of the blood of Jesus... The moment, that you yield your life to Jesus, and cry out, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." You instantly become a saint... That is who we are.

But that doesn't mean he's not going to finish us and perfect us. When we get to: **V⁶ 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.**

And so, you might look at yourself now, and feel "I'm not much of a saint". But don't despair. God hasn't finished with any of us yet. He's going to keep working on us, and transforming us (sanctification is the theological term), and that won't be completed until the day that Jesus returns...

Sometimes, when the Gospel gets preached, we get given the impression that "All I have to do is say the Sinners prayer, and that's it"... But the truth of the matter is, "When you first gave your life to Jesus, that's only the beginning"... He **began** a good work in you that day, and your life (from now on), is to be a life of discipleship – following Jesus, until the day that He returns...

But the **overseers and deacons** seem to get a special mention here. What's that about? He's writing: **To all the**

saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

The overseers (spiritual leaders) ἐπισκόποις (episkopois) “Bishop”... And the way he’s using it here, the overseers are **Spiritual leaders** within the local church. And deacons, were the helpers / service/support... Alright, so let’s think of the Overseers as the Spiritual leaders, and the deacons are also leaders, but in the area of a more practical support within the church...

But, do you notice here, that it’s not only the Overseers and the deacons, who are the saints... The **whole** church are the saints. Are the overseers and the deacons more important? No – they just have a different role within the church. Are they more holy? No, they’re not.

Righto:

In V2, he gives a greeting:

² *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

What a wonderful greeting: Grace; Peace... Sometimes we need to be reminded of these, don’t we... And yet, in some churches, there isn’t a lot of Grace to be found; and there isn’t much Peace (within the church, even)...

But in Christ, this is our bread and butter – Grace and peace... Undeserved gift (forgiveness) and peace with God, and peace with each other.

BTW, we're only 2 verses into this yet, but have you noticed how many times Paul has written:

- God
- Father
- Lord
- Jesus
- Christ

Look at this: here's the 11 verses we're studying today: What do you think Paul's focus might be in this letter??? He sure mentions Jesus and God a lot, doesn't he.... And that's exactly his focus... Paul's in jail. He's just about completed his race. And his focus is on Christ...

We live in a nation where (physically) we have pretty much most things we need... and yet we are a nation (who even before Covid 19 filled **many** with great fear), anxiety and depression were rampant... We are a people who crave "peace", but they look for it anywhere but the source of peace... Paul knows about peace, and he knows where it comes from... Chained in prison... and his focus was on Christ – he had all the peace in the world.

And I reckon, as we work our way through this letter to the Philippians, we're going to find it quite relevant for us at this time, as we discover Grace & Peace & Joy & Contentment (in the face of adversity).

Let's move on:

V3, introduces the reason, why Paul wrote the letter... He's pouring out his thanksgiving to God, for this church in Philippi...

Every time he remembered them (and he remembered them often, because he prayed for them often) and when he prayed for that Philippian church, it was always a prayer of joy...

That's not the case, with a lot of churches he prayed for. When he prayed, it was often a prayer of distress/concern/despair (Lord, what on earth are they doing???) But not with the Philippian church. Why? Because of their partnership in the Gospel...

These guys weren't consumers of God / consumers of ministry – they were **partners**. They were partners in ministry...

I don't know if it's always been this way, but it's certainly the most common model of church today: Probably because we are a 'consumer culture', largely, we've become a consumer church... Do you know what I mean by that??? The church will provide a product, or a service, for me to consume. And that might include:

- Worship service;
- Youth ministry;
- Mums groups
- Mens groups
- Camps
- They might even provide a Christian School
- Child-minding when I go to church
- Kids ministry

The church will provide a service for me, and I will consume it... And in many cases, the whole mega-church model, seems to be based on this – a person’s desire, to have church done to them... And if I find a church that provides a more comprehensive service, then I’ll just move there...

But do you notice why Paul is filled with joy here??? They’re not a consumer church. They are **partners** with him in ministry...

And that’s the way they’ve always been, right from the time when they were first saved... And let me tell ya, that’s the sort of culture I want to see grow in **this** church...

There are all sorts of ways that we can partner... For some churches, the main thing they want is your money... And financial support, is important. In fact, that’s some of what Paul is thanking the Philippians for – they provided for him, while he was in prison/on mission...

And even our ministry here at Bush Disciples, we couldn’t be doing what we do, if we weren’t receiving support from our regular givers... And in fact, more of our income comes from people who don’t live here, but they’re benefitting from the ministry, and so they support us financially... And thank you for that – that’s one form of partnering...

But with some churches, that’s the extent of how “partnership” is viewed... “Partner with us” becomes a code for “Give us money – become a regular giver”, so that we can continue to provide the service that you consume...

Now, I've deliberately said that in a rather crass way, and the reason I did that, is I want you to become a partner with us, in a way which is more than financial...

How??? When you live so far away, how can you partner with this ministry of Bush Disciples? Well in a way, we want to partner with you...

This ministry of Bush Disciples, **cannot** achieve what we believe God is calling the church in the bush to do – to take the Gospel to people in the bush. We can't achieve it, but you can ...

- I'm not in the place, where you are;
- I don't meet the people, you meet;
- I don't attend the cattle sales, that you go to;
- I'm not in, your workplace;
- I don't shop, at your grocery store;
- I don't chat, with the same roo shooters ...
- I don't live next door to your neighbour...

But you do. And the only way the gospel is going to be shared in your community, is if **you** are the one sharing it...

Or, what about if instead of watching church at home alone, you invite another couple of people, to come and worship with you... This is how you can partner with us in ministry...

Our main ministry, is unashamedly “a teaching ministry” – Teaching the Word of God, is what we do – we try to make it easy enough to understand, without stripping the Gospel of

any of its power... We make a whole bunch of resources available for churches and individual Christians out in the bush to use, and to help them to be the church that God wants them to be...

And, every now and then, someone contacts me, and tells me that they've been listening to these messages for a while, and that the teaching has been really helpful for them... Now, I might be a bit shallow, but that's a real encouragement for me, and not just for me – it's an encouragement for the whole church...

But do you know what I've learned through this??? Most people who have connected with us, have done so, as a result of somebody else, telling **them** about the ministry... If it's something that helps you to grow in the Lord, tell somebody else about it; and tell them it's free; and show them how to access it...

Righto, so, do you get the point??? Partner with us:

- by sharing Christ where you are;
- in prayer
 - for us
 - anybody who's being touched by these messages;
- and if you find this resource helpful, tell other people how to access it...

That's how you can partner with us.

Righto, when we get to V7, Paul says:I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace,

both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel.

What Paul is saying, is, “We’re all in this together”... In Christ, the Christian church, is a fellowship of Grace. And in Christ, we are:

- a fellowship who support one another; and
- love one another; and
- build one another up; and
- we are in ministry together...

And he identifies 3 ways, that the Philippian church were doing this:

1.

They were supporting him in his imprisonment... Their jails were nothing like our jails today. A large part of Paul’s daily sustenance, would’ve depended upon the support coming from Christians who were not in prison.

And I hope our eyes, aren’t blinded to the persecuted church today. We have every opportunity to care for Christians who are suffering for Jesus. Through organisations like “Open Doors” & “Barnabas Fund”, we can support the persecuted church.

2.

They shared in his ministry, in the defence of the Gospel. Do you realise, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is under constant attack. It gets twisted; it gets misrepresented. (And not only

in the world – People in the church, are twisting the Gospel today).

And we the church (every one of us), need to be active in the defence of the Gospel.

This is the difference between the church in Philippi, and the Church in Corinth. In Corinth, as soon as Paul left, the false teachers moved in, and the church accepted it... But that didn't happen in Philippi... The Christians in Philippi, actively defended the Gospel.

3.

They shared in his ministry, through the **confirmation** of the Gospel.

How is the Gospel confirmed? Well, I believe we can see a picture of this, in the next few verses, and it's got a lot to do with "Love"; affection; fellowship...

Jesus said: John 13: (ESV)³⁵ **By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

I don't know what I was thinking, when I thought I would be able to cover all that in this one message today... That'll be the topic for next week v7-11.

But I'm just going to leave you with this: To confirm the Gospel, is to demonstrate that it is true...

- The Gospel isn't just a concept;
- Not pie-in-the-sky-when-we-die;

- Not something which is idyllic, but non-existent
- The Gospel, among the people of God, is to be demonstrated.

Love; fellowship; purity; righteousness; holiness...

May the Gospel be confirmed in us, as it was in the Philippian church...

Let's pray:

Oh our Heavenly Father,

We want to thank You for your abounding love.

We want to thank you for the sainthood we have in Christ Jesus...

That even though we were totally undeserving, by Your Grace, You have made us holy, through the Blood of Jesus.

Lord, may we never take this for granted.

May we be partners with one another, in the Gospel.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit, that we would confirm the Gospel;

That our words wouldn't only say that it's true,

But that our actions **demonstrate** its truth.

And as Paul prayed, I now pray, that [our] love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that [we] may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Amen.