

With You, In You, and Through You

By Dr. Deryck Barson

Bible Verse: Philippians 1:3-8

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Bethel Orthodox Presbyterian Church

1401 S. Naperville Road

Wheaton, IL 60189

Website: www.bethelopc.org/

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/bethel-wheaton

Our Old Testament reading this morning is from Micah 4:1-2. That's Micah 4:1-2. Hear now the reading of God's word: It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, ²and many nations shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Let's turn to the New Testament to Philippians 1:3 for our New Testament reading, which will also function as our scripture text this morning: "³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶And 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. ⁷It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace,^[a] both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." This is the word of the Lord.

Let's pray together: *Heavenly Father we thank You for Your word, Your word is good and true and life to us. We ask that You would strengthen us this morning and give comfort. We know Your grace. May we be conformed more and more into the image of Your Son. In Jesus name, amen.*

Life can be exceedingly challenging at times and here, in Philippians in what Paul would be, what would typically be referred to as one of those times. He's in a dusty Roman jail, likely in the city of Rome, if we understand the letter to be dated at the end of his life and ministry. And yet, we find Paul is radiating joy. And at first blush, the imprisonment and joy appear to be the most unlikely of bedfellows and it's not exactly what we would expect. What we often associate today with joy is more properly termed happiness. Happiness is fleeting. It thrives in the context of ease of prosperity and of comfort, but it's gone at the first sign of hardship. And yet on the other hand, we find that joy is far more robust, it is deeper, it is grounded on something far more substantial and it endures hardship. Joy is qualified internally, whereas happiness is often triggered by external circumstances. We run after happiness, this way and that, only to be occasionally grasped; something that is ever so fleeting, that we miss the true joy that is on offer.

In this letter, we find Paul, who previously was an angry man, who tried to, with every fiber in his being to imprison those who professed faith in Christ, now himself being in prison. And he's imprisoned for the gospel. For the faith that he once so futilely tried to destroy. And instead of murderous threats and seething rage, Paul has great joy, even in prison. He has come to grasp the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. Of being found in Him. And although Paul is in physical chains because of the gospel, he is no longer bound to sin and its enslaving power. The theme of joy that courses throughout all the chapters, all four chapters from beginning to end, is not some persona that Paul is putting on. This joy arises from a deep reality in the depths of his soul. He is rejoicing in the Lord, in his Savior, in his King, and that he is now in Christ. And so pervasive is this concept of joy in the letter to the Philippians, it is mentioned twelve times in the hundred and four verses of the letter, that some commentators in fact think that joy is the overriding theme within the entire epistle. But the joy that's evidenced in this letter in fact, arises, from something far deeper; a joy that is found in Christ. A joy that arises from a partnership in the gospel with this church in Philippi.

So, friends, when we consider what, in fact, joy is, we actually see that joy is a fruit. It's a fruit like a fruit of a tree like an apple or an orange or a banana. It's that joy arises from something, but it's not the thing itself. And this is why when you chase after joy it so often eludes you, but you gain joy when you grasp the substance itself. See, when you grasp that which produces joy; that which joy arises as a fruit, joy will always be present. It's for this reason that this former persecutor of Christ now finds himself imprisoned with great joy saying, 'For me, to live, is Christ and to die is to gain Christ'.

Our text this morning considers the first section of Paul's prayer for this church. It's a prayer that runs from verse 3 and runs all the way through verse 11. And the prayer is broken up into two kinds of prayer: a prayer of thanksgiving and then a prayer of petition. So, our text this morning, from 3-8, considers the prayer of thanksgiving. And then in verse 9, we see this prayer of petition as Paul intercedes for the church and asks God that the love of these Philippian believers would abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment.

I'd like us to consider the first part of this prayer, this prayer of thanksgiving, from 3-8, and I'd like us to do this through the lens of three prepositional phrases: 'with you, in you, and through you. That's 'In You, With You, and Through You'.

And so, our first phrase this morning is 'with you'. In Acts 16 we read that the city of Philippi was a leading city within the district of Macedonia, which was a Roman colony, and the church of Philippi was founded during one of Paul's missionary journey. When God had caused, first caused, Lydia's heart to be opened when Paul preached the gospel and her and her entire household were baptized. And as is often the case when you read through Acts and you read through Paul's writing, we find that Paul finds himself in prison after preaching the gospel. Lives have been transformed, sources of income have been altered, and magistrates have been summoned. And while in Philippi, Paul had cast out a demon from a slave girl who had been making money through fortune telling for her masters. And so, with the demon now gone, the prospect for financial gain through divination was also gone. And she'd been set free; this is what Christ does. But the men who wickedly prospered at her expense were enraged, and so Paul and Silas are dragged off the Roman

rules, they are beaten with rods, steel rods, and thrown into an inner prisoner with their feet being locked in stocks. Which basically is the first century equivalent of our maximum-security prisons today.

And trembling, in fear, as we read in Acts 16, we find a jailer comes crying out. Why does he do so? Because Paul had not forgotten Paul and Silas in that prison. He had not forgotten the purposes of founding the church in that city through the gospel. And these two men were singing hymns and praying at night, at midnight and God caused, in the middle of their time of prayer and worship for a great earthquake to shake the very foundations of that prison. Such that their bonds were unfastened. And so the Philippian jailer rushes in before Paul and Silas and says ³⁰ “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds;” remember, their wounds from the rods and from the stocks, “and [they] was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴ Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.”

This is the very first snapshot of God’s work through the gospel in the city of Philippi. And then, some years later, Paul together now with Timothy, write to the believers in Philippi. And by this time, the church had been formally established. There are marks of maturity. Offices of elders and deacon have been set in place. The church has become a model for other churches in the region. And we see the lengthy relationship has developed between this church and Paul. And in verse 3 of our text, Paul is remembering these dear saints in Philippi and he lifts his heart in thankful prayer to God, doing so with overwhelming joy; grateful for their partnership in the gospel. And from this, the very first day of their salvation, until now, they had partakers with Paul in the grace of God for missions, both in his imprisonments and in his defense and confirmation of the gospel. Paul was not alone; His church was right there with him in the cause of the gospel. In other words, as one commentator said, they identified with Paul, and in they thoroughly supported him in gospel ministry. He was not alone in his suffering either. In fact, at the end of this letter Paul says when he first left Macedonia, no church whatsoever entered into partnership with him in giving and receiving except this church in Philippi. They alone were concerned for his wellbeing, for his physical status, for his material provision, and like Paul, this church was not ashamed of the gospel or the ministry of the gospel to those without Christ. They were neither ashamed of the message of Christ nor the mission of Christ. Even when the offense of the gospel, of the cross, brought them into conflict with the surrounding culture, as when a slave girl, freed from her demon, has now caused them to be imprisoned; or that being Paul.

And so, at times like this, the church stood alongside Paul. Both in spirit as well as in deed. What we find permeating the entirety of this letter is a deep affection between Paul and the church in Philippi. We already noted last week that Paul makes no reference in the opening of his letter, in his greeting, that he is an apostle. There was no need to do this. The remarkable relationship between Paul and this church is so evident. It’s evident in their support of him. They attended to his needs. In fact, they had sent Epaphroditus to Paul as their messenger to him and as their minister to him and his needs. And so now, in this letter, Paul is in fact sending Epaphroditus back to the church. Epaphroditus almost died when he was ministering to Paul, he became exceeding sick, and what we see in this partnership in the gospel, in the obedience to the great commission, is that such

obedience is not without hardship or opposition. Something far deeper, in fact, fuels this. So, despite the opposition, despite the hardships that may come, there is something far deeper. And that is Christ. And their partnership in the gospel is more real to them than anything else, such that joy arises in such days.

See, what's amazing about this partnership is that its not limited to just a few zealous folks in the church. It's labelled to all the saints; all the saints in Philippi, together with the overseers and the deacons. It's quite interesting when you have a look. Paul wrote 13 letters, 9 to churches, 4 to individuals. We find that this is the only church to which Paul writes no apostolic greeting, to the saints, and to the elders and the deacons. There's a togetherness evidenced here in terms of their mission to the gospel. Not all of them are preachers, not all stand on the corner with a microphone, but all are in support of Paul and of his ministry, even when he finds himself behind bars, they do not abandon him. And this is the only church that Paul refers to as 'my joy and my crown'. Those whom he longs for and loves, as we see in chapter 4. And its from his prison cell, that Roman dusty prison cell, that we find in our text, that he yearns for this church with the affection of Christ, holding them in his heart. What an amazing, amazing way to be cherished. What joy, what affection.

Now, the reason for Paul's thanksgiving to God and prayer is in fact, yes, it is for their partnership in the gospel, but its informed by a far deeper reality, something more basic that we find in verse 6. The one who had been doing a good work through them in their partnership with Paul in the gospel is doing a good work in them; our second point.

Listen to verse 6: "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." What a remarkable, remarkable verse. That good work *in you* refers to salvation. Paul says there is an inceptive point in the life of a believer. A temporal existence when God called them. A specific time or the action of God in their life in which God worked salvation in them. And for Paul, it was very sudden, very clean, it was evident to himself it was on the Damascus road. He was physically blinded by a bright light that caused him to have the eyes of his heart opened ot see the light of Christ. Now he could see Jesus no longer as an enemy but now as his Lord and his Savior.

But it's important for us to pause and say that not every conversion is alike. Not everyone has a conversion like Paul. Not everyone has a Damascus road experience where they can point to the place, the time, the hour where you can say 'this is when I believed in Christ and I was born again.' For many, you can simply affirm and marvelously affirm that 'there was a time in which I didn't believe, but one thing I know is there is now a time in which I do. I believe in Christ.' And we can illustrate these two understandings, or two ways, in which we might consider conversion or salvation from our perspective using the following analogy. An analogy of a border crossing. As if we were traveling as a passenger in a car or train across the border and you're certainly not the driver of the train or of the car, but you are crossing into a new country. In one scenario, you crossed into the country when you were asleep at night. You were in the back of the car, you don't remember the border at all, previously you were in one country, and when you woke up you were very firmly in the other. In a new country. But you have no particular recollection of a particular moment or place or hour when you crossed to the new country. You have no particular recollection in terms of the exact moment of when you came to Christ. But what's undeniable is that you are

no longer in Adam, you know that you are in Christ. For others, like Paul, you weren't sleeping in the passenger seat in the back, you remember exactly where it was when you were driven to the other side. When you saw the border crossing. You saw the border. You could point, right over there; there's the old country. I'm no longer there, now I'm here, in new land. You can see the dividing line between the two, just like Paul could. One moment, he was the enemy of Christ, persecuting the church. The next, Christ called him to himself and said 'come, Paul, follow me.' What's important is not whether or not you were awake or asleep when you crossed the border. What's important is having been brought into the new country. Did God take you across such that you now believe in Him?

See, Paul wants to, he highlights when God first, when He began a work in him--in you--but he goes on to highlight an additional aspect of our salvation that He who began a good work in you is He who will bring this work to completion. In other words, salvation, in its entirety, from beginning to end, is thoroughly a work of God. And what a marvelous comfort to the soul that is; to consider salvation as a work of God. From beginning to end, he preserves believers all the way to the end that none can snatch you from His hand. And this doctrine is commonly called the perseverance of the saints or even preservation of the saints; God's preservation of saints. In other words, those who have been bought with the shed blood of Christ are kept by God to the very end. Nothing can separate us from Christ or His love. Listen again to Romans; Paul writes in Romans 8, ³³Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?"

This is exactly what we find in Hebrews 12, when Paul says He is the originator and the sustainer of our salvation, He is the founder and perfecter of our faith. And Paul looks at this church and their partnership together with him in the faith, in the gospel, and he sees evidence of a true and lively faith. He sees good works arriving from the work of the Spirit in them. They could not do it without the Spirit's enabling. These Philippian believers are the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus for good works, for partnership in the gospel. And He who worked salvation in them is currently at work in them and will ultimately lead them all the way home. And so He who justified them is sanctifying them and will one day glorify them as He makes them perfect, makes them holy.

Friends, there are three little words that encapsulate the biblical doctrines of grace, three little words pregnant with so much meaning. And they shed light upon Paul's statement that He who began a good work in you will begin it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. And these three words are simply: God saves sinners. God, and God alone, saves sinners, from beginning to end, sinners, under the condemnation and penalty of the law. What a marvel! What amazing grace!

We need to move on, and far we've seen 'with you', meaning partnership with Paul; we've seen 'in you', meaning God's thorough work in them; and lastly 'through you', our final point.

These Philippians knew from the very beginning of their faith that to share in Christ is to be partakers in Christ and His matchless benefits. But to be partakers in Christ and His matchless benefits is also to be sharers in His sufferings. To be partakers in Christ would include bringing

them in real contact with inherent conflict that comes with the ministry of the gospel. You cannot get around that. You cannot get around being reviled and accused on account of the name of Christ. Philippians knew this. And so, instead of hiding the light that is in them, or as Christ said putting the lamp under a basket or under a bed, these Philippian believers were on a mission with the gospel to those around them, to their neighbors and their colleagues. They were on mission also into the nations and their partnership with Paul.

We might actually turn this church in Philippi as a model church in the faith. They were an example to others. They didn't have the issues of immorality and decision as we find at the church in Corinth. They didn't have the false teachings that crept in amongst them as we find in the churches in Galatia. Neither did they become lukewarm as we see in Laodicea. Their faith was authentic. It was genuine. It was sincere. But it couldn't be kept to themselves. It bubbled over into the church and into the surrounding communities. It didn't mean that everyone had a microphone or a platform, but that the church, in a unique way, understood the Great Commission of God, to make disciples of neighbors and nations close and far. Just across the fence, next door, as well as across borders, across the Roman empire. And some of them were called to office in the church, to be elders and deacons, but for the most part, they were saints. Called of God, holy ones, to be a holy nation. And the gospel gave them a picture of life that spanned the grave. A perspective that reached beyond this world, into the new heaven and the new earth. It enabled them not to fall into the trap of living and having, on one hand, a sort of escapist mentality and fleeing this present world, nor, on the other hand, being solely beholden to this present world and its renewal.

What's amazing about this church is that they understood the 'both and' of being exiles in a foreign land, working for the common good, while simultaneously knowing they were pilgrims on the way to their heavenly home; the new Jerusalem, the very dwelling place of God. And in the end, for all who have crossed the border into the new country, whether one remembers how they came in or not, we have access to a grace, as the Philippians did with Paul, in partnering in the gospel. For God is at work in you and He who is at work in you will complete what He started. And as He works through you, He will work through you for His glory, and for the good of those around.

I want to close with just the following and say that as you go from this place this morning. Called into the various vocations, callings which God has placed you, I want to exhort you to look for opportunities to build relationship. Opportunities to be light and salt for those around you. Do so over time. I want to exhort you to seek out ways to truly serve and love your neighbor as yourself, pray for them. Have them over for barbeque, for coffee, for golf or football, for whatever you prefer. And as you do that, may God give you courage. May He give you gentleness, wisdom, and favor. As we stand together in the gospel, lifting high the cross, till all the world adore that sacred name. Amen.