

## Message #4

## Philippians 1:3-8

I will never forget something that happened to me years ago in my first church. It had been “one of those days,” in fact, it had been “one of those weeks” in which about everything that could go wrong did go wrong. It seemed like everything was falling apart. That afternoon my phone rang and the voice at the other end asked if I were Pastor Thompson. The week had been so bad, I hesitated, but then said, “yes.” He said he had just returned from Mexico and had run into a former student of mine named Andy who wanted him to contact me to say hello.

It seems that Andy had gone to Mexico and had preached the Gospel and people got saved and so he started a church and it grew to the point that they built a building, and men were raised up by God to become leaders so Andy turned that church over to the leaders and went down the road and was doing the same thing in another area. The man on the phone said God had remarkably blessed his ministry and when this man had asked him where he learned to preach, he had mentioned my name, which is why the guy called me. He called me to let me know how Andy was doing.

When I hung up the phone my whole week and day had just been turned around. With one phone call my day went from negative to positive. That one phone call put me on a spiritual high. You could have called me a bunch of derogatory names and it would not have fazed me. You could have even called me a Baptist, or an Arminian or a Legalist and it would not have bothered me. One report of one faithful student made my spirit soar. It left me humbled, thankful and joyful.

When Paul wrote this book of Philippians, we could say it was in the context of being “one of those years.” It was one of the years he was sitting in jail and it was even worse than that. He did not know whether he would live or die, which, humanly speaking, is as lousy a circumstance in which one could ever find himself.

As he was sitting in jail, he was moved by God to write letters and when you read those letters it is clear he is anything but miserable. **It is also clear that one of the things that brought him so much joy in the midst of his own personal hardships was the memory of faithful people of God and one of the specific things Paul did was to pray for faithful people he remembered.**

Now every once in a while someone will come to you and say, “I have been thinking about you lately.” Most of the time, it is such an encouragement to heart that. That is what Paul does here.

It brought Paul great joy to be able to pray for these people at this Philippian church. This church had truly been founded by God. Paul was not intending to go there and a man from Macedonia came to Paul in a vision so he went. This Philippian church truly had been founded by God. The memory of these people brought Paul much joy.

**WHEN WE FIND OURSELVES IN HORRIBLE PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES, ONE THING THAT CAN BRING US JOY IS REMEMBERING FAITHFUL PEOPLE OF GOD AND PRAY FOR THEM.**

True fellowship and true joy does include praying for others. Paul experienced much personal joy in remembering faithful people and praying for them. We may be certain that if Paul found joy here, so will we.

Now as we look at this first chapter, we may notice that there is a key articular noun that Paul keeps repeating “the gospel” (1:5, 7, 12, 17, 27; 2:22; 4:15). It is quite clear from **verse 7** that this gospel is the Gospel of grace. So Paul found great joy in those who had believed in the doctrine of the grace of God and were developing in the doctrines and defending the doctrines of the grace Gospel. Now the word “gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον) is one that refers to the good news that Paul proclaimed about being saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. These Philippians believed that and Paul found great joy in that.

There are two main grammatical parts to these verses:

**GRAMMATICAL PART #1** – Paul was thankful and joyful in remembering and praying for all the people of this church. **1:3-7**

It is a very rare church when you can thank God for all of the people all of the time. Typically you can thank God for some of the people some of the time. But that was not the case with this Philippian church.

Paul is very emphatic on this point, he thanks “my God.” Paul had a very personal relationship with God. In that relationship, he talked to God about these Philippians. He talked a great deal to God about them.

There were three realities about the Philippians that brought Paul joy and prompted him to pray:

**Reality #1** - Paul was thankful, joyful and prayerful because of every memory. **1:3**

The verb “I thank” is a present tense verb that means Paul continually and habitually thanked God because of all the wonderful memories he had concerning these people.

Now let us begin by saying these people were not perfect. In fact, we will see that they still needed to “press on” (Phil. 3:13-14) and they still needed to work on developing more unity and more righteousness (1:11, 27; 2:2; 4:2). He wanted these believers to have more knowledge and discernment and become more mature (Phil. 1:9-10). He wanted them to become more Christ-oriented and less self-oriented (2:3-5). So when Paul says he thanks God for every memory or all memories he has of them, he does not mean they are perfect.

Paul does not say I thank God because you are sinlessly perfect. But in the big picture of this church, these Philippians were developing in the Word of God and were defending the Word of God and grace of God and whenever Paul thought about this church, he was thankful for them.

This was a good, solid church of people who were spiritually minded and Paul thanked God for them.

**Reality #2** - Paul was thankful, joyful and prayerful for every saint. **1:4**

Notice Paul could pray for “all” the people of this church. All the people of this church brought him joy and moved him to pray and thank God.

This must have been an amazing church because Paul uses the word “all” multiple times. In **verse 1**, he wrote to “all the saints in Christ.” In **verse 4**, Paul is joyful and prayerful “for you all.” In **verse 7**, Paul felt good about “all” the people and the “all” were partakers of grace. In **verse 8**, Paul longed to see “all” of them.

In **verse 25**, Paul longed to minister to “all” the people. In **2:17**, Paul rejoiced with “all” the people. In **4:15**, Paul wanted “all” greeted. Paul saw the church as a unit, involving “all.” He was thankful for the younger men and women; he was thankful for the older men and women and for the boys and girls.

This is an amazing church. All of the people were on the same page. They all embraced grace and they all loved the Word of God. This church made Paul happy and he found great joy remembering the church and praying for it.

**Reality #3** - Paul was joyful and prayerful for legitimate reasons. **1:5-7**

Paul was a very logical thinker and if he reached a point in which he could continually thank God for a church and could pray for a church, there were legitimate reasons for it. In this text, he states three, which all begin with a word that starts with the letter “F”:

**(Reason #1)** - The fellowship reason. **1:5**

I like what one commentator said, God never saved anyone just so they could add church attendance to their weekly schedule. We are saved to be part of the family of God.

Paul found great joy in thinking about this church because of their fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until the time he wrote this letter some 12 years later.

The word “fellowship” (κοινωνία) is a Greek word that is used for two fellowship actions: 1) Communion; 2) Contribution. In other words, in the N.T. to have fellowship with someone meant that you united yourself with them and in some way shared and contributed to their lives.

The Philippians had not only embraced Paul and the Gospel, but they actually financially supported him. From the first moment he went to Philippi and for the next 12 years, they got behind Paul's Gospel, his teaching and they supported him. This financial support that these people gave to Paul was actually something that would go on their eternal account and credit to the work of God through Paul (4:17). They shared in Paul's life and ministry. That is what made Paul happy.

Paul never had to ask these people for money and he never did. They just took it upon themselves to support him. They knew he was preaching truth. They knew his grace Gospel was right. That Gospel had changed them. So they united with Paul. They got behind him and supported him and as Paul was sitting in a jail, that thought brought him great joy.

You don't find a lot of joy thinking about people who let you down. But you find great joy in people who don't.

**(Reason #2) - The finish reason. 1:6**

Paul found great joy in thinking about what God was doing with every Philippians believer. God was involved in two Divine Actions:

**Divine Action #1 - God is the One who begins the good work in a believer's life. 1:6a**

God's work is always a good work and not a bad work and when He saves someone He did the good work; He did the grace work. Salvation is not of man, nor is it of the will of man. Salvation is of God. This is important. Paul is sitting in jail with the possibility of dying and he is reflecting on the fact these people had been the recipients of the sovereign work of God. Now every believer in Christ is a believer because God has touched his mind and heart.

One commentator who has written a good commentary on the Greek text of Philippians writes: "Theologians who speak of salvation as being God's from beginning to end are not using mere rhetoric, for this is precisely Paul's conception as he addresses the Philippians regarding their share with the gospel: 'Do not misunderstand my commendation; it was not you who began this work, but God, and He will complete it.'" This is exactly what is stated here in this text (Moises Silva, *Philippians*, p. 51).

Paul found great joy in his private life and prayer life knowing these believers had been touched by the sovereign power of God. It is important that we always remember that God has a good work going on in every believer.

**Divine Action #2 - God is the One who finishes the good work in a believer's life. 1:6b**

The word "perfect" (επιτελεσει) is a Greek word that means God will fully complete the work he has started until it is finished. Paul knew that God would continually keep developing and maturing these Philippians and use them until they ultimately saw Christ Jesus.

Now we will see Jesus Christ one of two ways, either death or rapture. Paul was confident that God would continue to do His work in the people of this church until they went into the presence of God.

Paul did not think this way about every believer or every church. In fact, he was very concerned about the Galatian church (Gal. 3:3; 4:9-11) and the Corinthian church (I Cor. 3:1). He did not think that God would permit every church to develop and mature and finish well, but He did believe this about the Philippian church. He knew that God would take care of these people all the way to the finish line, whether or not he lived or died.

**(Reason #3) - The fitting reason. 1:7**

The word “right” (δικαιος) is one that means being joyful and thankful about faithful people is the Biblically right thing to do. It squares with what is Biblically righteous and just and true.

Now there are three prepositional phrases that explain why this is right to think this way:

**Phrase #1 - Paul had these believers “in my heart.” 1:7a**

Paul’s heart was encouraged and enriched by these people. As someone said this was a great church because it was a church Paul could have in his heart rather than one that was on his nerves.

**Phrase #2 - Paul had these believers “in my imprisonment.” 1:7b**

Paul was so close to these Philippians that they were right there in his heart and mind as he was in jail. They were there with him.

**Phrase #3 - Paul had these believers “in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.” 1:7c**

That word “defense” is the word from which we get our English word apologetic. These Philippians were apologists in that they were bold to defend the grace Gospel. The word “confirmation” means these believers were dedicated to establishing and validating truth pertaining to the grace Gospel.

Notice what he says in **verse 7**, “you all are partakers of grace with me.” This is what matters in life and death issues. What really matters is that we are partakers of grace. No one can have fellowship with God or with other believers until one has experienced God’s grace. Fellowship is found in grace. Paul said in Ephesians that God will show that we were the recipients of His grace in the ages to come (Eph. 2:7).

These Philippians were people of the Word. These Philippians were grace protectors and preservers and defenders and promoters. That brought Paul much joy while in prison.

Paul would not find great joy in people who wanted to be under the O.T. law but he sure found great joy in people of grace.

**GRAMMATICAL PART #2** – Paul longed to for all of the people in this church. **1:8**

It is obvious from this that Paul wanted these Philippians to know that even though he was in prison, he longed for them. God was his witness. He had a love for them in Christ. He longed to see them and to fellowship with them.

The sweetest relationships that will ever be formed are with those who love Jesus Christ and the grace of God.

This Philippian church was so refreshing to Paul. It was not a draining church.

Now Paul is in eternity. So let us ask ourselves a question. Would Paul be thankful for us because he knows we have experienced God's grace and we defend him and his message?