

Last week, I began a new sermon series through the New Testament book known as Philippians, which I am calling “To live is Christ and to die is gain,” a line which Paul writes in chapter 1, verse 21 of this letter. Philippians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul while he was in prison, most likely in Rome, sometime between 60-64 AD, to a church in Philippi that he had started about 10-15 years earlier.

Last week we looked at the first two verses and why Paul, or anyone for that matter, would willingly see their primary identity as that of a servant of Jesus Christ. This morning I’ll read those first two verses again and we’ll go all the way up to verse 8:

*Philippians 1:1-8 - Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> 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**. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

Let’s pray.

I would say that one of the first things that jump off the page is the intense and sincere affection which Paul feels for the people of this church. He thanks God for them. He prays with joy. He is confident of good things for them. He has them in his heart. And he longs for all of them with the affection of Christ Jesus. These are not just clever words that Paul is sharing for the purpose of manipulating them towards some selfish end. They are welling up from within him because of experiences that he has shared with the people of the Philippian church. **So what is it that aroused such affection in Paul, and what can we learn from it about our own faith and relationships?**

I think there are two levels to the answer, so let me start with the lower level before moving up a level. Think about the people in your life that you would call your friends. What is it that separates a genuine friend from a fair-weather friend? I think the distinction between the two is revealed when you go through difficult

times, when friendship becomes something that costs the friend something: time, money, energy. You may have 1000 friends on **Facebook**, but how many of them would be there for you in a time of crisis?

When I look back at my life, there have been those precious few people who have been willing to give of their time and energy and even their money to walk with me or with my family through our darkest times. I think of Paul, nine years ago, coming over to listen for hours to Michele and me as we tried to work through our issues. I think of Jim, buying us a gift card to what would become our favorite restaurant and watching our kids so that we could take a much-needed date. And there are people in this church who have been true friends, who have stood by me and my family for years. The people who are there for you when life is hard, the people who are willing to sacrifice for you – those are the people who cause such affection to well up in you, who cause you to say “I thank my God every time I remember you.” It’s why those who have served together in the military often carry such a deep bond with each other – those who have walked with you through the hardest times in your life and have sacrificed for you are true friends.

It's like the Proverb says: **Proverbs 17:17** - *A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*

Or as **Proverbs 18:24** says, “*A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*”

If you didn’t know, Paul’s life was filled with adversity. Listen to this passage, which Paul wrote in response to a group of people in Corinth who were doubting his authenticity as an apostle:

**2 Corinthians 11:23-29** - *Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, <sup>26</sup> I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in **danger from my own** countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. <sup>27</sup> I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. <sup>28</sup> Besides everything else, I face daily the*

*pressure of my concern for all the churches. <sup>29</sup> Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?*

That is quite the list. Remember that Paul had been sure of his life's direction as a Jewish Pharisee and persecutor of Christians, and then the risen Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus Road, let him know he was completely and totally misguided in his passion, and completely transformed his life into a follower of Jesus. Now, all of a sudden, his friends had become his enemies, and his enemies were slowly and tentatively becoming his friends. So why does Paul express such deep affection for the Philippian church? One reason is that they have been true friends, sticking by him through all the challenges he has faced.

But as beautiful as that is, there is a higher level of connection that causes Paul's outburst of affection. It is, as Paul puts it in verse 5, their partnership in the gospel.

***Philippians 1:3-8*** - *I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

Paul thanks God for the Philippians because they have partnered with him in the gospel from day one until the day he writes this letter from a Roman jail. They have defended the gospel against those who would seek to destroy it. He has confirmed the gospel in people, which refers to the work of discipleship, raising people up to be followers of Jesus. And they have stood by him even when he is in jail. And so, he thanks God for them. He prays with joy and confidence for them. He longs for them with the affection of Christ Jesus. Throughout the letter he will reiterate this point:

***Philippians 1:18-19*** - *Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.*

***Philippians 4:10*** - *I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.*

***Philippians 4:14-16*** - Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup> Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; <sup>16</sup> for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.

Paul's expressions of affection come from his experience of how the Philippians have partnered with him in the gospel and stood by him through the hardest times and supported him when he was in need. That is what causes him to write "I thank my God every time I remember you."

In case you didn't realize it, other than Nicolle, our nursery worker, I am the only one who is paid to be here today. Not one of you has to be here. In this church, we preach salvation by grace here, that we are saved by the gift of God in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross for us.

***Ephesians 2:8-9*** - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.

Not one of you is saved by your good works. Not one of you will earn your salvation by your church attendance or service to others. I once was at a Catholic wedding where one of my Catholic relatives, as he came up for the Mass, asked the priest if this counted. In other words, does this fulfill my duty for the week or do I need to come back on Sunday? That is not the way it is here. Eric does not have to back in the booth. Rich does not need to lead worship. Holly does not need to lead the greeters, and Barbara does not need to coordinate coffee ministry. Michele does not need to oversee children's ministry. They are not getting paid, and they are not earning their way into heaven by their service. If you give a tithe or offering today, it will not be put in a heavenly account that will grease the wheels into heaven for you.

If you truly believe that you are saved by grace, and yet you still come, you still give, you still serve, it shows me that you get it. You get that we give not to earn His love but because He has given us so much. We serve because He gave His life for us. We love because He first loved us. We recognize that the gifts, the talents, the time, the resources, the money are all undeserved gifts given by a God who owed us nothing but condemnation. We are here, and we serve, out of love and gratitude to Him and to love others as He has loved us.

What is my point? I am so thankful for each and every one of you, for your partnership in the gospel. I am so grateful for those of you who give, who serve, who sacrifice. I am so thankful for those who have walked alongside me through some real hard stuff at this church. You have shared in the grace of God's gospel with me, defending it, confirming it, giving of yourself to the work of God here at this church.

I want all of you to partner with us in the work of the gospel. There is no cause more meaningful to give your life to. Step up and serve in the various ways, providing hospitality, reaching out to our community, helping our church care for each other, leading groups, teaching the kids.

Do you know how you distinguish between a genuine friend and a fair weather friend? See who is there when you go through suffering. Do you know how you distinguish between a genuine Christian and a fair weather one? **See what happens when they go through suffering. See who is willing to sacrifice.** The pseudo-Christian follows God, but when life gets hard, they curse God and give up their faith, because in the end it wasn't about God but about what He could do for them. And if it doesn't look like He's coming through, then to Hell with God, so to speak. But the genuine Christian is not in it for themselves, but for God's glory and for the salvation of others, and no price is too great to pay for those ends, because no price was too great to pay for the one who saved us and who we serve, Jesus Christ.

This is why Paul can write these beautiful words with such confidence:

***Philippians 1:4-5*** - *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> 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.*

He who began a good work will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. In other words, Paul is saying, I am confident that your faith is genuine, that you belong to Him, that He has called you, that He has saved you, His Spirit is in you, He is at work in you and that He will take you to be with Him when this world is over. The way you have been faithful to the gospel and to me through every challenge and suffering that has come your way shows me that your faith is genuine. **I am not going to get into the predestination-free will stuff today, as this dynamic will show up a couple more times in Philippians, and we will address it at that point.** For now, just recognize that Paul sees their faithfulness through suffering and commitment to sharing the gospel as evidence of a genuine faith that

God has initiated, that God is sustaining, and that God will eventually perfect. It is not all up to you and your ups and downs. If God initiated it, God will sustain it, and God will eventually complete that good work. What an encouraging word from Paul, letting them know that he sees God at work in them, that because their faith is genuine, God will keep them until the end. Trust in Him.

Do you know how you distinguish between a genuine friend and a fair-weather friend? See who is there when you go through suffering. Do you know how you distinguish between a genuine Christian and a fair weather one? **See what happens when they go through suffering. See who is willing to sacrifice.**

This morning, I want you to think about others who have impacted your life, those who have been genuine friends and those who have partnered with you in the gospel. Is there anyone about whom you would say, "I thank my God every time I remember you." Is there anyone who you see as a gift from God given directly to you, for your encouragement and comfort? In your bulletin, I have included a thank you note and envelope as my gift to you. Your job is to write a letter to someone expressing your gratitude to God for them.

And lastly, is there anyone out there who thanks God every time they remember you? I have had the privilege of being at a couple funerals recently, and times like that are always opportunities to reflect upon how you are living your life. What will people say about you when you are gone? Will there be people thanking God as they remember you? Has God given you opportunities to be a genuine friend to someone in need? I know He has given you the opportunity to partner with us in the work of the gospel, to serve, to love, to give, to point people to God and to His love and salvation. How can you live your life today with the end in mind, living so that others will one day thank God because of your presence in their lives?