

Philippians 1:3-8

Thankful Prayer

Paul opens his letter with a prayer for the church in Philippi. We can break that prayer down into two sections – thankfulness for what has happened and a petition to God to expand on what has already been done. We'll look at his thankfulness this morning and we'll look at his petition for them next week.

[3](#) I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, [4](#) always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, [5](#) for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, [6](#) being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ; [7](#) just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. [8](#) For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

How does Paul **feel** about the Philippians?

- Thankful for them
 - o "I thank my God upon *every* remembrance" there are no sore spots in his memory, no, "except for that time when you..."
- Joy
- Longs for them, "**greatly... with the affection of Jesus Christ.**"
 - o This is the trump card of I love yous. Maybe it's not as Romantic as Shakespeare or a Hallmark card, but how much more affection could you have for someone?

His overall attitude is tremendously positive, this is a good relationship. Philippians is known as the epistle of joy; joy and rejoicing are mentioned 16 times in four short chapters. But what is Paul so joyful about, why does he talk about them this way?

We see the answer in verse 5:

[5](#) for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,

So, Paul's thankfulness, joy, and love "with the affection of Christ" is based on the fact that they have received and embraced the gospel, that is, the good news about who Jesus was and what He has done, **and** they have remained committed to and changed by the gospel over the years. All of this gives him confidence for the future and its what he'll ask God to increase in the following verses.

Remember, Paul was involved in starting this church – we read that story in Acts chapter 16 last week, and then, ten or twelve years later or so, Paul writes them this letter. The point is, he knows some of them, personally, and has known them, "from the first day until

now.” And since then, they have had the gospel in common and that has created fellowship between them.

“Fellowship” – koinonia – also translated as “partnership” in some of your translations. “Partnership” gets closer to the idea in the original language – koinonia isn’t just *being* together, it’s *participating* together, working together, being of one accord. It’s the kind of unity that is forged when people struggle together in the pursuit of a common goal.

I had a book recommended to me once titled *The Company They Keep* by Anna Simmons.

- Harvard PhD in anthropology, working in Somalia out of the embassy in the 90s
- Met SF guys, married one, got permission to write a book about them – not their missions so much, as who they are on the level of personality and character
- Teams are made up 12 men – an A-Team, on each team is a Team Sergeant – grizzled E-8 Master Sergeant, the “Team Daddy” who is responsible for taking care of most of the training and day to day issues of the team.
- She’s writing after Somalia, and after the first war in Iraq, and so she’s talking with him and asking how keeps the team together functioning as a team, when you’ve got all these hardcore type A guys to corral and some of them have seen combat together but now some of the original team are leaving and new guys come in to take their place. How do you bond them together? And his answer was – you get them to experience shared adversity. You get them to sweat and bleed and suffer together and that will create experiences they’ll be able to tell stories about later when they hang around the BBQ.

Bonding doesn’t occur around the BBQ – it occurs out in the mud. Fellowship is forged when you’re working together, not when you’re partying together.

We see something similar happen on mission trips and outreaches. When you take a bunch of people from church and send them halfway around the world or down into the inner city to share some adversity and to work for a common cause, they wind up experiencing a bonding together. They have stories to tell about “Remember when...” “yeah, that was crazy.”

Most of us don’t get this though. We think the way to get to know people is just to hang out and see if we can have a good time together. That’s socializing, or partying, that’s not fellowship.

A missionary team, a group serving at the mission downtown, or people serving together in ministry like Paul and the Philippians form a fellowship, they experience koinonia, *because* they have struggled together for the same cause – in this case, the cause of Christ, the greatest cause of all.

But related to fellowship is another important quality – faithfulness. It’s one thing to know that you’re there next to me. It’s another thing to know that you aren’t going to leave when the going gets tough. And Paul and the Philippians had proven that to each other time and time again.

[Z](#) just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.

Now, there is a question here that the scholars haven't come to agreement on, and that is, have the Philippians experienced chains, or imprisonment or persecution like Paul has, or have they only stood with him as he experienced these things? It could be either case. But what we want to look at this morning is Paul's perspective. Whether they have experienced the trials he has or not, they *have* stood with him through thick and thin.

You might remember from last week, that when Paul first came to Philippi he and Silas who was traveling with him, were beaten and thrown in prison for being missionaries. And now, a decade later, he is writing to them while under arrest in Rome. Paul suffered much for the sake of bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to others.

In our comfortable American lives we sometimes forget, but throughout history people have been put death simply for communicating or accepting the gospel.

You may have heard about the case of Youcef Nadarkhani, a 34 year-old Iranian pastor, a husband and father of two children who has been sentenced to death in Iran simply because he is a Christian. In his trial his lawyers tried to argue that he hadn't really left Islam because he had never been a practicing Muslim as an adult, but the prosecution argued that he should be put to death simply because he was born into a Muslim family and that alone was enough to merit death for converting to Christianity.

That man knows way more about what Paul experienced than you or I will probably ever know. And the Philippian church stood with Paul through it all. They had **faithfulness in their fellowship**.

We just wrapped up a home group on marriage, and we were talking a lot about a very similar thing. We said many times that marriage is a unity – two becoming one. It's the deepest form of fellowship there is. You might share more intense experiences with others – for example combat or a disaster, but you shouldn't share more intimate experiences with any one other than your spouse. There should be a level of unity and intimacy there that isn't found anywhere else.

And this fellowship, this unity, should be held together by your commitment to one another, your faithfulness.

Here is why this is so important. It's easy to find someone you can party with. It's easy to find someone you can have fun with and who likes having fun with you. But that's not what creates true fellowship. Partying together, hanging out together, having fun and thrills and googly feelings together isn't what creates the glue that will hold you together. If you want a deeply secure, trustworthy, dependable relationship, you have to suffer well together.

And if you stick together long enough, life will give you plenty of opportunities to do that. Life on this planet, which is still infected by the realities of sin, will give you plenty of chances to face the suck together. And it when it comes, what you need is someone who will embrace you and walk with it all through you. Not someone who will run or drift away in the face of difficulty.

What or who do you have that kind of commitment to? Who has made that kind of a commitment to you?

We live in a consumer culture that looks at life with the attitude of “what can I get out of it?” Things, and even people, exist to fill needs in my life. I’m here to be served, not to serve. And if things get difficult, or require sacrifice, or sweat, or tears, something must be wrong and it’s time for me to get a new one.

But that’s not the attitude the Philippians had toward Paul, they stayed committed to him both in his chains **and** in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. That is, they stayed committed to him when things were going well **and** when the going got tough. In every possible situation they stuck by his side and were “partakers with me of grace” (vs 7).

And that right there is critical – it’s a hint about how they were able to remain faithful in fellowship: they had experienced grace, not just saving grace but also sustaining grace, the same God who had saved them proved time and time again, in the midst of the trials, that He was available to them as a source of strength in their darkest hours.

Back up with me and look at verse 6:

[6](#) being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;

Now, why did we look at verse 5 earlier and then jump up to verse 7 then skip back to verse 6? Because there is a dance being played out here and this is the best way I could think of to show it to you.

You see, Paul is confident that God has begun a good work in the Philippians and that He will complete it BECAUSE he sees the evidence of their faithful fellowship.

Faithfulness in fellowship was proof that God has begun a work in them, and Paul knew that what God begins, He is certain to finish, though notice, that work isn’t finished until the day of Jesus Christ – that is the day you enter His presence completely due either to your death or His return.

We’ll talk more about this next week, but there is this three stage progression where God begins a work in us at the moment of our salvation – all of our sins are forgiven and a new life begins, that is JUSTIFICATION. It’s instantaneous, and it’s complete. You are instantly forgiven of every sin you have committed and every sin you will commit. You switch jerseys, and you’re on a different team, locked in for life.

But, unless you also die in that moment, you will be left here on earth to continue to navigate the difficulties of this planet and your fellow human beings, as well as enduring temptations to do what you want to do instead of what God commands. This is the process of SANCTIFICATION and it lasts as long as you live.

Some people, when they surrender their lives to Jesus, have radical conversion experiences and their life takes a sudden 180 degree turn, but for many of us, probably most of us, we slowly and awkwardly stumble toward Heaven each day by surrendering more and more of our attitudes, actions, and decisions to God so that bit by bit we are being transformed more and more into the image of Christ.

You can think of it as a big mirror covered with a nasty gunky film. Sometimes God cleans it off with a big splash of water and sometimes He works off lit bits at a time. What's important is not so much how long it takes, but that progress is being made and that over time you begin to reflect more and more of Him.

When I was a little boy I remember, in our bathroom of all places, we had a frame on the wall that said, Please Be Patient, God's Not Finished With Me Yet. That's the idea Paul is getting at here in this very popular verse.

It's a powerful reminder that **progress** should be observable in the Christian life and one great evidence of that progress is faithfulness in fellowship, not turning tail when the going gets tough, or telling God to wait when He confronts you on something that needs to change in your life.

Now, if you keep saying yes to what God commands, if you stand firm in times of difficulty, you will find the grace that you need to endure. It will be there as a gift from God. I'm too feeble minded to be able to understand it myself, so forgive me for not being able to explain it completely to you, but there is truth to the paradox that *as you demonstrate faithfulness to God*, He demonstrates His faith and grace towards you. So Paul could say, *on the basis of the faithful fellowship that he observed*, he had confidence that God had begun a good work in the Philippians and He would be faithful to complete it.

And then that completion is what we call GLORIFICATION, when you enter into His presence fully and the transformation is complete for all of eternity.

This morning, is your life aligned with the gospel of Jesus Christ and His purposes?

Could Paul find evidence in your life of faithful fellowship in the gospel?

If so, you have two hands and two things to hold on to – the promise of grace for the moment, and hope for the future knowing that He who began a good work in you WILL be faithful to complete it.

Jesus said, in John 14:18, "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you."

He is no “fair weather friend” He is the rock on which we are told to build so that we can survive the storms of this life that WILL come. Your relationship with Him is forged and hammered, tested and strengthened during the times of tears and it is there that you also learn the depth of His commitment to you.

If on the other hand, there is no evidence in your life of faithfulness in the fellowship of the gospel, these promises are not yours. You cannot claim them. You have no right to them and no guarantee whatsoever that God is working things together for your good.

But that can easily be changed. God doesn’t expect you to do anything to earn His gifts – He freely gives them to those who wish to receive. If you ask Him to, you can be guaranteed that He will begin a good work in you, and He will never leave you nor forsake you, but He will be faithful to complete it. All you have to do is ask.

Summary: Paul prays for the church in Philippi with feelings of great joy because of their fellowship in the gospel and demonstrated faithfulness which gives him assurance that they will finish well. We can have the same assurance if we follow the same path.

God grant us the grace to be found faithful to you and to those who are closest to us. Pour out your strength in our lives so that we can be a source of joy in their lives. And have your way in us, prove your faithfulness to us, give us the expectation of glorification as YOU finish what YOU have begun.