

IV. The Jubilee in Biblical Perspective
The Year of Jubilee and the Great Commission
“AFFIRMATIONS FROM A MISSIONARY PRAYER LETTER”
Philippians 4:10-20
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February 28, 2010 – Morning Sermon

The text for this study is in Philippians 4 and we will conclude our mission’s conference this evening with Communion. Our ethnic congregations will join us in Communion tonight. It will be a very special service tonight. The Lord earnestly desires to sit at the table with you and that we might sit together with the Lord. Now let’s look at our text for this study. This is the Word of God. It’s the Truth.

Philippians 4:10-20 says, **10** *I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.* **11** *Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.* **12** *I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.* **13** *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* **14** *Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.* **15** *And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.* **16** *Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.* **17** *Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.* **18** *I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.* **19** *And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.* **20** *To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

The grass withers and the flower fades. This is the Word of God. It abides forever, by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

I would like to talk about your faith promise card for a minute. Notice the content on the card. Almost 50 years ago our church embraced that at the heart of our existence will be the fulfillment of the Great Commission. We want to be a church that is committed to making disciples of all the nations, baptizing them, teaching them, and being faithful to the Lord by the power of the Spirit of God until He comes again. At our very first mission’s conference we sent out a missionary. We found out that missionary needed \$6,000 to get there. So our very first mission’s conference and our very first missionary at Briarwood almost 50 years ago was a commitment to \$6,000 and the Lord blessed and brought in \$6,365.00. Praise the Lord because we had forgotten in the budget that the missionary had to be flown in and over but the Lord’s budget had already taken that into place when \$365 extra had come in and was actually needed. So that was very much a beginning.

Many of you are new Christians here and new to Briarwood and just so we are on the same page as a congregation I want to be able to explain this to you. Every year in the fall our congregation goes through a season of stewardship in which we inform our leadership of what by God’s grace will be our tithe, our regular offerings which we bring in obedience to the Lord. The tithe is an act of honor and obedience to the Lord. We

give it in worship but in a sense tithing isn't giving, it's obedience in bringing to the Lord that which is His. It is the Lord's tithe. You'll hear Bruce Stallings say that every week when he says, "Let's worship the Lord with His tithes and our offerings."

There is one key offering at Briarwood for us beyond that tithe and that is the faith promise offering. Your leadership takes that every member commitment and somewhere around 45 to 48% of your tithe, we actually send out of Briarwood. Just like your sending out tithes and offerings, we send out as well. So 45 to 48% of that goes to local, regional and national church planting, church revitalization, evangelism, discipleship, mercy, benevolence and all kinds of things outside of Briarwood to extend the Kingdom of God. But early on our leadership said we want to shoot at 50% that is .50 cents out of every dollar that comes to Briarwood leaves Briarwood for the work of the Kingdom. One might be thinking, "You just said 45 to 48% so how did you get to 50%?" It's because every year we take the faith promise offering and commitment and that goes out 100%. So when that is added to the other that's how we get basically to the 50% each year. So we are at that point now with our faith promise.

We take faith and say, "Lord, what do I believe that You will send to me that I promise will get through me." That's really the key. The Lord will get to you what He knows will get through you. So Lord, what is it that You're going to give to me that's going to go through me beyond my regular tithe and giving? This is my offering. I'm giving an offering here and what is it that You will do through me?

This has been a great 50 years in our commitment to the Great Commission. Over 6,000 short term mission trips have been sent from Briarwood. Over 450, we don't know exactly, of our own members have been sent into vocational cross cultural missionary work. I would like to say every member of Briarwood has been sent as a missionary. Remember, you're either a missionary or a mission field. So we're all missionaries but over 450 of our members have gone out vocationally cross cultural world evangelism as a missionary. We have and are serving the Lord in 95 countries for the work of the Gospel. By God's grace we don't have the number, we only know we have been used of the Lord to plant thousands of churches – daughter, granddaughter and great granddaughter churches in 50 years. We do know hundreds approaching a thousand leaders where God has allowed us to be engaged in their official training to be pastors, teachers and then the unofficial training for leaders in the church. We do know that and that's celebration. Praise the Lord!

Now there is anticipation. This year starts the next 50 or until Jesus comes. I'm kind of hoping Jesus will come real soon. Someone said to me the other day, "Harry, have you read about all these earthquakes? Jesus is coming!" Earthquakes are not the sign of Jesus coming. Those are birth pangs and that tells you that Jesus will come. Jesus said the sign of His coming will be when this Gospel has been preached to all the nations, then the end shall come. All the earthquakes that have been happening just tell you there is an end. That's not the sign of the end. The sign of the end is the Gospel preached to all the nations and when the last one has been brought in then the Lord comes. So that's what we're doing in hastening the coming of the Lord. Almost 50 years by God's grace and 42 million dollars plus has been given in faith promise giving.

We are about ready to start on the next 50 this morning. When we finish the service this morning we will bring our commitment cards before the Lord and to the Lord. We will ask our missionaries to stand up front because that's the way they did it in

the early church and they would bring the offerings to the sent ones by laying it at their feet. This is recorded in the book of Acts. Then we will send our missionary country flags out because we're headed until Jesus comes again. Notice on the card you will put your faith promise on, it has on the front where that will go. So this is what you believe beyond your regular giving what God will get to you to give through you.

On the back side of the card there is a place that you will mark as to how you will pray for our missionaries and our missionary endeavor strategy at Briarwood. There is also a way that you can be engaged personally. Maybe you're on the Global mission's team or maybe you'll go on a short term mission's trip. Maybe you want to know more about mission's ministries or special projects. There is a way that you can be engaged personally. So how did those items get on that card? Was there a great strategy, brainstorming session by the elders of the church? No. Here is what simply happened. We looked at passages from the Bible where it says "Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into the harvest."

We then looked at passages like the one for this study from the book of Philippians. The book of Philippians is an exciting book to study. It's so hard for me to go there and pull one sermon out for you. It is a great book. It is a book to a church and did you notice this is the only church that Paul allowed to regularly give to support him as a missionary? The rest of them Paul didn't allow them to give to him regularly. In fact he told Corinth "I didn't let you on purpose to forgive me for that. I didn't let you do it on purpose." But Philippi is the one church that he allowed to support him.

Philippi is an interesting church. It was founded in Acts 16. Do you know how this church got started? A Philippian jailer and his household were converted. Lydia, a Jewish business woman, was converted and a slave girl who was demon possessed was converted and delivered. So we have a Gentile Roman soldier, a Jewish business woman, and a demon possessed slave girl. Boy that is some core group to start a church with but that's the church that was started there. Can't you almost hear it? There is neither Jew, nor Gentile, nor male or female, rich or poor... So that's how this church gets started. Then this is the church that Paul allows to "partner" with him. So he allows them to partner in the Gospel ministry in the extension of the Kingdom with him on some regular basis.

He writes this from prison and here's one way to read the book of Philippians. It's almost like a missionary prayer letter. I always tell missionaries if you want to know how to write a prayer letter back to your supporters then read the book of Philippians. Paul is writing a letter as the missionary back to his supporting church and when he writes the letter he affirms three things that they did. What is it that the Apostle Paul affirms in the life of this church?

I believe in the inherency and the efficiency of the Scripture. I don't think we need to come up with a whole new strategy about how to effectively fulfill the Great Commission. I think we just need to go back to the Bible. How did they do it and turn the world upside down in less than 25 years? Let's go back and see how they did it. So here was a Great Commission church engaged with a great Co-missionary, the Apostle Paul, who writes back to them and affirms three things that they did as a church. That's what I want you to see.

What are the three things that Paul affirms? I want to look in Philippians 1:18-20 which says, *18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ*

is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. In other words he's saying, "I rejoice that Jesus is proclaimed. I don't care who proclaims Him or why they proclaim Him, I just want Jesus proclaimed." The second thing Paul says is, "I want you to know that I don't ever want to dishonor the Lord. Whether by death or by life, I don't want to dishonor the Lord. I want the Lord to be honored in my life as I live it and as I die. I want to live by faith, die in faith and I want Christ to be honored. That's all I want."

Then Paul said, "I know that through your intercessory prayers and the help of the Spirit of Christ...." Wait just a minute Paul, "Is it the prayers of the people that will deliver you so that Christ is proclaimed and you stand full of courage to the end or is going to be by the Holy Spirit? Which one is it Paul?" Paul says, "Yes. It is the Lord who will deliver me but He will deliver me through the prayers. It's not the prayers that deliver me. It's the Lord that delivers me but the Lord delivers when His people pray." God delights working with and through the prayers of His people. I never use the phrase "pray changes things" because I want to be very specific with people. I think God changes things but I do like to say this. God changes things through praying people. You have not because you ask not. It is through the intercessory prayers of God's people that the Holy Spirit would work in through the Apostle Paul. So the first thing Paul affirms is the regular intercessory prayers of the sending church.

I tried to illustrate this earlier. When I was a kid one time I think my dad just needed a good laugh. He said, "Alright son I want you to turn your hands this way and grab them." I said, "Okay dad." Then he said, "Now I want you to bring them up like this." I said, "Okay dad." Then he pointed and said, "Move that finger" and then he took one of his fingers and pointed it at one of my fingers and when I tried to move that finger the other finger moved. If he would have just touched the finger I could do it but when he was pointing to it I couldn't do it. I would always move the wrong one every time because when I would cross my hands and did like this, then entwined my arms cross my hands and pulled it back up it was confusing my brain. It does not take much to get my brain confused. I would always do the wrong finger.

That's the way my Christian life is about. God sovereignly moves through the prayers of His people. God's providence and our prayers are inseparably entwined. God works through a praying people.

The second affirmation I want you to see is the relationship that he enjoyed with these people. Paul affirms the enjoyment of a personal relationship with these people that they were personally engaged with him. Paul says that we are in partnership together. "What I am doing, you are doing through me. What you're doing, I am doing. We are partnering." If you go back through the book of Philippians Paul will use that word 'partner' many times. We are joined together in this Great Commission enterprise and what I'm out here doing you are doing because you are engaged with me. In fact the relationship meant so much that he would just tell them "you're my heart" and then when they gave this financial gift he said, "I'm excited and it's not the gift but I'm excited about the fruit to your account in heaven." Then lo and behold they send a short term

missionary named Epaphroditus over there who put the touch on it. So there is a personal engagement.

It's not only intercessory prayer but we are personally engaged. Briarwood's missions ministry can't be a program. It must be personal engagement to people who are being sent to reach people. It is people engaged with people in Christ to reach people for Christ. When those who go out from us go we went with them. We are fellow workers with the Truth.

The third affirmation Paul affirms is regular giving. This deserves so much more but isn't interesting how when he talk about their gift did you notice the language? He said the offering he brought was not an offering to me but it was an offering to God. It was a fragrant aroma. It was a sacrificial gift. Do you see the worship language here? Their gift in this mission's endeavor became an act of worship to the Lord Himself. As they gave for this enterprise they were actually giving to the Lord. It wasn't so much a statement about Paul. It was a statement about their love to the Lord. It was their love and confidence in the Lord that caused them to send the message of the Gospel in Christ to the world through the one whom the Lord has called, the Apostle Paul. So he acknowledges this sacrificial gift.

Notice that this isn't a tithe. It's a sacrificial gift. It is something that they have sacrificed. It is something that they are regularly giving as a church by individuals sacrificing and then sending it personally to him accompanied by their intercessory prayers. So those are the three affirmations – prayer, personal relationship, and giving. So if we're praying, giving and participating then how can we do this?

The best record at Briarwood has been 57% participation in the faith promise commitments. I understand a number of people maybe doing their missions giving outside of the Briarwood ministry and I certainly understand that. That's between you and the Lord. I love to give to our mission's ministry here and I want to tell you why I love to give. I heard a testimony at the earlier service and I can keep hearing testimonies. I know what our missionaries are teaching. I know what they are doing. I know they're accountable and for that I am so grateful as a steward of the Lord's money. That's why I love to give to Briarwood. Cindy and I give beyond our faith promise giving to world missions here but I love to make that a main delivery system of my faith promise offering for missions. It's because I know who we are sending, what they are doing, what they are teaching and that they are accountable. I am so grateful for that and I understand others want to give outside of Briarwood and that's between you and the Lord, praise the Lord.

When I look at 57% as our largest participation I think what in the world would happen if we had 100%. It may be \$100 or \$100,000, I don't know what your sacrificial gift is because that's between you and the Lord, but what would happen with 100% participation and how do we get there. So I have one takeaway for you. I was talking to another preacher and you may hear this until you send me away or until the Lord takes me away. This has really captured my heart in this matter. So here it is.

Live simply, to give sacrificially, and pray regularly. I know we are in tough economic times but I am grateful in tough economic times because we have to live simpler so it's even better in our times today. Live simply, to give sacrificially, and pray effectively. Live simply. Perhaps I don't need that new car this year or I don't need that suit or I don't have to pay that much money for it because I'll go somewhere else and get it. Praise the Lord for Steinmart. I don't have to buy up here, I can buy right here. I

don't have to buy that this year. I can wait two years. I don't need to go there for my vacation. We can go here and I'll use that half to give. Now I know that it's just between you and the Lord but why don't I just make a commitment to live simply. If I live simply I'll cut down on how many things I'm doing and I may even have time to pray. I'm talking about doing it while you're traveling down Hwy 280 but actually going and sitting down in a chair to pray and meet Jesus. Have the three missionary prayer letters there that I'm praying for. I've actually got the time to do that. Live simply and I'd like to tell you to do that for yourself. I don't want to have to visit you over at the 8th or 9th floor of the hospital where they have to put the pads in the rooms. I'll visit you there but I don't want to have to visit you there. Live simply, to give sacrificially, and pray effectively.

To live that way, I want to give you three thoughts. To live that way you have to first be intentional because the world tries to get you to live in complication. You have to be intentional. K.I.S.S. – Keep It Simple Saint. You're not stupid. Lord, I want to be intentional. I want to teach my children simplicity. We don't have to be engaged in 9,000 things. We can really enjoy just sitting around reading a book at home some night with the fire going and a cup of soup. I know it sounds like Normal Rockwell but its fun. Then we can finish the evening by praying for the missionaries. We can actually live simply. You have to be intentional.

Secondly, you have to embrace the Great Commission that this becomes dear to you. Thirdly, you have to believe that Jesus is enough. I'm going to start teaching a Bible Study in the morning at 6am on counterfeit gods because I know how counterfeit gods try to get in our life. They get in our life when we think the One True and Living God is not enough. Paul gave you a hint here. He said, "I've learned how to live simply" however he didn't put it that way. He said, "I've learned to be content" (Philippians 4:11). You can't live simply until you learn contentment in Christ and you can't be content in Christ until you believe in the sufficiency of Christ. If it's Christ plus something then that something will become the dominant factor in your life but when Christ is enough then you can seek first His Kingdom and let things be added instead of seek things and Jesus get added. It is when Jesus is enough. It's not Jesus is the next toy. It's not Jesus plus the next trip. Jesus is enough. Everything else that He adds I use for Him but I don't live for that. I live for Him because He is enough.

Paul said, "I have learned to be content" why? He said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). What else does he say? He says, "For to me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). Christ is enough. So if I have a lot, then praise the Lord I'll use it. If I don't have much praise the Lord, I'll trust Him. I'll trust Him in any and everything because He is enough. That's where the Apostle Paul brings us. Embrace the Great Commission, be intentional, live simply and then Christ is enough.

This last week I had the enormous privilege to do a funeral to send off one of our wonderful elders, Billy Spain. Billy went to be with the Lord this last week and I had the opportunity and the privilege to officiate at the funeral about how to finish strong. There were all kinds of people from the business world and obviously many from our church. He was a wonderful churchman. He was so engaged. He was such a leader. He was such an example. He was a wonderful elder and teacher. He led one small group for 20 plus years but there were also people from Walk Through the Bible there and other places

because Billy had made a commitment early on. His daughter said it was when the regime changed, he went away on a mission trip, came home and Jesus became King and it was enough. One of the things Billy invested in was the next generation and a college by R.G. LeTourneau. I was raised in the Christian Missionary Alliance and R. G. LeTourneau was like a patron saint in that denomination. He was apart of all these earth movers and stuff like that. He was the man everyone writes about because he would give 90% and keep 10%. I didn't get a chance to say this at the funeral but I wanted to save it to say here as I saw the LeTourneau board members here. R.G. LeTourneau was asked one time why was he so generous. He said, "Well, I just got a shovel and whatever the Lord gives me I shovel out. God shovels in and I shovel out and God's shovel is bigger than my shovel."

God is enough in Jesus. Live simply, to give sacrificially and pray regularly. Let's spend a few moments in silent prayer just you and the Lord. You have that card before you and we'll make a commitment in just a few moments. Many of you have already spent the time praying through this but spend a few moments in consecration and contemplation. Lord, what are you going to send to me to go through me? How am I going to pray? Certainly lift up our 300 plus missionaries but is there an area this year that God is going to lay on your life to pray for? Are there 3, 4 or 5 missionaries in particular that you will pray from specifically? Think through it so you can indicate it before the Lord on that card. How will you systematically, sacrificially give what God will bring to you supernaturally?

Prayer:

God, I love this moment so much and I love these people that You have loved so much. I love the way that they love You so much. Father, as we make these commitments, we do so with great anticipation for the next 50 years. We look forward to getting started on it. Lord, there has been over 42 million dollars given but how many million times have Your people, this church, bowed their head and bent their knees in prayer for the Great Commission and missionaries. O God, make us a praying people, millions of times petitioning the throne of Grace and joyfully and sacrificially giving as we live simply for Jesus. God, thank You for those whom we are able to send that we might be partners with them, protect them, encourage them, enliven them, give them a great vision for what they are doing and where they are doing it and we thank You we can be a part of it. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.