God's Good Work

Jonathan Cruse | Midway Presbyterian Church | Morning Service | October 4, 2026

Scripture: Philippians 1:1-8

Introduction

I do not believe it's entirely uncommon for ministers in a new charge to select Philippians as the first book that they would preach through. In my study this past week I discovered that James Montgomery Boice decided to preach on Philippians when he first began his pastorate, which would go on to span 30 years at 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, PA, Kerri Ann's home church. And if I'm not mistaken, I do believe it was the first book that my brother David Strain preached when he was installed as the senior pastor at First Presbyterian Church, which is Rebecca's home church. Why is it that ministers are drawn to this book? Certainly there are any number of reasons we could think of - the joyful atmosphere that you step into when you open up the pages of Philippians from chapter 1 the whole way to the end of the book. Or we could think of the christological heights to which it takes us in chapter 2. Or perhaps the down to earth practicality and application of Christian doctrine to Christian living which meets us in almost every chapter as well. All of these were certainly draws to me as I considered what to preach. Draws to me as I begin my ministry here. But I expect many preachers like me are ultimately drawn to this book because of the wonderful model it presents of the happy partnership in the Gospel that pastors can and ought to share with their churches.

Paul was the planting pastor in Philippi. You read of it back in Acts chapter 16. Philippi is a Roman province in modern-day Greece. It was Paul's first European church. He plants it along with Luke and Timothy. And you'll note there in verse one, he's writing this letter back to the Philippians along with Timothy. And maybe you remember how small that church was at its inception and the colorful cast of characters that made-up its initial core group there. A successful businesswoman, a pious woman who's leading a prayer meeting when Paul and Timothy encounter her. But then there's also a young slave girl who's being misused and abused, who is saved from her demonic possession by Paul's ministry. And of course there's a jailer who has converted along with his family.

But now if you look at verse one Paul writes to all the saints in Philippi, the church has grown. It's not only grown, you see, it's organized. "To all the saints in Christ Jesus along with the overseers and deacons". So now we have saints, elders, deacons, laity and leadership together worshipping the Lord and serving one another. And this all makes Paul so very joyful. It's impossible to miss how he is simply just brimming with gladness as he pens this letter. Particularly, we hear it in the opening, which we're looking at this morning. But essentially it's this - When Paul thinks of the Philippians, he smiles. He's filled with joy. And he's filled with joy because he is thankful and he is confident. That's what we're going to see this morning. That it is his thanksgiving and his confidence which leads him to his joy. Paul is filled, joyfully filled with thankfulness and confidence. And friends, I want us all to leave this morning filled with the very same things. I want you to leave today filled with a joyful thanksgiving when you think of your church. And I want you to leave this morning filled with joyful confidence when you

think of your God. That's what I hope for us to see and to walk away with today as we study these verses.

I. Thankful for Their Gospel Partnership

So, why is Paul thankful? Why is he filled with joyful thankfulness? Why is he constantly offering up acclamations of joyful praise to God when he thinks of the Philippians? You see this exhaustively exuberant tone in verses three and four. “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine, for you all making my prayer with joy.” And then he circles back in verse eight, doesn't he, where he invokes God as a witness to say this is not mere flattery. What does he say? He says, “For God is my witness. I really yearn for you with the affection of Christ Jesus” And so why is he so thankful for them? Well, the reason is given in verse five. Would you look there with me at verse five? He says, “because of your partnership in the gospel.” Now the word translated “partnership” is one of those Greek words that has entered into the vocabulary of many Christians, or at least it sounds familiar to you - koinonia. It can mean fellowship or partnership. As it's written here, perhaps it is better translated as communion or mutual sharing. What does it mean though? What is it? What is this gospel fellowship? What is this gospel partnership, and why does it make Paul so happy?

Gospel Partnership Is Shared in Christ

I think there are three things we could say about true gospel partnership. First, gospel partnership is that which is fundamentally shared in Christ. What is true gospel fellowship, true gospel partnership? It is that which is shared in and through Christ, and we see that in verse seven as you look there. Paul says “It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart (or literally because I have you in my heart) for you are all partakers with me of grace …” Partaker also comes from koinonia, so he says this fellowship we have is something that is rooted in the grace of the Gospel. This is what has bound Paul and the Philippians together. This is what has suffused them as one. To be partners with one another means that we are partakers together with Him. To be united to each other as a body is a reality that can only be true because we are first united to our head, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is true gospel fellowship, that is true gospel communion. A partnership and the fellowship that we share as a church is not based on zip code, on skin color, or on your pay stub. The fellowship we share is not based on the culture that you were raised in or the culture that you currently live in. The fellowship that we share is not based on whether you call all forms of soda “Coke" or you only call Coke “Coke" like a rational person. That's not going do me many favors, is it, moving forward? But again, we think of the disparate individuals that Paul and Timothy and Luke meet in Philippi. Think about how different they are here. You have this successful business woman, she's from Thyatira, and she's influential in her community. But then you have someone who's not influential at all. You have this young slave girl who's being manipulated and who's being extorted. She's part of this core group too. And then we have a Philippian jailer who's working for the Roman government along with their families. This is what brings them together. Certainly not their background, certainly not their shared experience. It's the fact that they all met the same Christ, they all received the same Spirit, and they all shared in the same grace. What brought them together was that they heard and believed that the blood of Jesus could cleanse them from every stain and sin. That's what united them together. That's what brought them together. Is that why you are here today? Are you here because these people look like you

or they talk like you or they sound like you? Or are you here friend, because these people, they stumble like you, they sin like you, but they lean on a strong Savior like you? That's the testimony of every Christian congregation, to be united in Christ around His Gospel, empowered by His love. It is His grace that constitutes us as a body. He is the means of our fellowship, not our background. As Paul will say elsewhere, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free. There is no male and female. We are all one in Christ.” He's the core of our communion.

A Fellowship Founded on Christ Is Indestructible

And why does this kind of fellowship bring joy to Paul? And why should it bring joy to us today? Because a fellowship that is founded on Christ is indestructible. If the basis of our communion as a church is on anything else, it will grow weak over time. It will fail. It will fade. It can fall apart. But with Christ at our center, our fellowship holds. That means we don't need to try to keep the church together through our own efforts, our own machinations. We don't need to keep the church together through sheer grit. We don't need to try to keep the church together by presenting ourselves as something other than we are, as though we're picture perfect. That's never kept the people of God together. It's always been the grace of the Gospel. So a church that is marked by this kind of gospel partnership, what is it? It's a church where Christ is heralded, where the grace of the Gospel is both given and received, where forgiveness is practiced, where humility conquers pride, where offenses are overlooked. It's a church where Jesus is the main thing. And with the joy of Jesus at the very heart of a church, how can we not also therefore be joyful? A church like that, or a pastor and person alike would be able to say, ”I always thank my God with joy when I think of my church”. Gospel partnership is first and foremost that which is shared in Christ, and that is a happy thing.

Gospel Partnership Is Shown Through Generosity

Secondly, gospel partnership is also shown through generosity. It's shared in Christ at a spiritual level, but it's not just spiritual, it's not just this ethereal thing. It's something you can see, it's something you can experience. And in the case of the Philippians, that gospel partnership is most tangibly expressed by a material monetary gift that they send to Paul. We're going to get to this in the weeks ahead, but in chapter 4, verse 18, Paul makes mention of the fact that they have sent a gift to him, and they sent it by the hand of one of their church leaders, Epaphroditus. In chapter 2, verse 25, Paul says he's sending Epaphroditus back with this letter. So, Philippians is essentially a thank you letter to this church that has supported Paul financially. That means, friends, that the call to the church is to live out our spiritual communion through material means, coming to people's aid when they are in need, even as the Cruse family has overwhelmingly experienced that from you all just this past week. That's gospel partnership. Christians are to, we could say, we’re to put our money where our mouth is. Christians are to support missions and ministries financially, as the Philippians have done here, but there are other ways to support as well. Because the Philippians did not just send Paul a gift, they sent him a person. They sent one of their very best, one of their leaders. They sent him Epaphroditus. Oh yes, it's a meaningful thing when we can set aside part of our financial resources to support missionaries. And then hear encouraging reports even as we had from our brother Pastor Petrou this morning in Sunday school. But I'll bet you he would tell you that while financial gifts are appreciated, it's hard to put a price on it when a short term missions team comes, when people come to visit. That's Paul here. He's not just grateful for what the

Philippians have, he's grateful for who the Philippians are. But they did not just send him stuff, they sent him someone. Friends, they've given themselves to Paul, and we are to give ourselves to one another. It is a gift joyfully received when Christians generously give themselves to one another. That's gospel partnership. It's ultimately shared in Christ. It's shown through generosity.

Gospel Partnership Is Shaped Over Time

There's one other element that we find here in our text and that is gospel partnership is something that is shaped over time. By that I mean it's something that matures and grows our fellowship, matures and grows true Christian communion. It is no flash in the pan, it's not a blip on the radar, but it's steady. Now we see that in verse five. Would you look there again with me down at verse five? He says he's thankful "because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." It was no easy thing for the Philippians to stick by Paul's side because he'd been through a lot since he had planted this church. And yet they have been with him in prayer and support every step of the way. Again, look at verse seven. "Because it's right for me to feel this way about you, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace." What does he say here, "both in my imprisonment and in my defense and confirmation of the gospel". You know, there would be easier people to support than someone who sort of had a habit of running in with the authorities. Yet as Paul was imprisoned for the faith, the Philippians never withdrew their support. What a model for us of what real Christian fellowship looks like. Sinclair Ferguson says this, "How fickle we modern Christians can be in comparison. Or often uncommitted. And consequently unreliable in times of difficulty, failure or crisis in the fellowship to which we belong. When difficulties arise, of whatever kind, we often seek more comfortable pastures. But not so the Philippians". And he says, "No wonder such a bond of love developed between Paul and these Christians". And notice also the renewing, or maybe we should say the restorative effect, their fellowship has upon Paul. Notice that his emotional equilibrium, we could say, is more tethered to the Philippians support than it is to his Roman chains. You would hardly know, based on the tone, that Paul is in a Roman prison as he writes this letter. He's so joyful. He's so happy. Friends, that's what is on offer when you commit yourself to true gospel partnership with your fellow believers, that kind of partnership which does not give up when the going gets tough. What is on offer is that you will find your burdens are lightened. That's Paul's experience. And when you find it's your experience as well, you will be thankful as he is thankful.

And so, friends, when we as a church live in this way, with a ministry that's centered on Christ, with a service that is embodied and intentional, with a fellowship that is faithful and steady, would we not also find that our hearts expand in love for one another as Paul's does for the Philippians? Has this not been your experience here at Midway? Of course it has. I've heard it from so many of you that you can say with Paul, I thank my God in every remembrance of my church because you have experienced this kind of gospel partnership here. And can you not say friends, it is such a joyful thing to be a Christian in communion. That's why Paul is joyful. He's thankful for their gospel partnership.

II. Confident in Their Perseverance

But there's a second reason for Paul's joy. And that is first, he's thankful for their partnership, but second, he's confident in their perseverance. That's the second and final thing this morning. He's confident in their perseverance. In other words, the wonderful fruit he has seen in the Philippians and experienced from them, he knows it's just the beginning. As the Gospel partnership that has begun, he believes, will continue. The fruit of God's grace in their lives will attain complete and full maturation and glory. And we find that in this beloved verse, verse six. Would you look there with me? Paul writes, “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”. I'm sure of it, he says. I don't doubt. I'm confident. And confidence leads to joy. Confidence gives birth to joy. Put another way, that confidence or assurance, whatever you want to call it, is of the essence of the Christian's happiness. When we are confident in Christ, we're joyful in Him as well. Doubt goes hand in hand with distress, but confidence is a fertile field for joy to grow in the heart of the Christian. Paul is praying with all joy because he has all confidence. Now how can we have that confidence, you ask? Well, the most important thing is to make sure you are placing your confidence in the right place. And that has to be in God and in God alone. Paul does not say, “I am sure of this, Philippians, the good work that you've been doing, you're never going to screw up. You're never going to give up. You're just great, you're just going to be great.” He doesn't say “ I'm confident in you Philippians”. No, instead. He says. “I am confident that He who began a good work in you will see it to completion.” This is a sign of.maturity in the Christian faith when we learn to never place ultimate trust or hope in fallible humans. But we can place all our hope, all our confidence, all our expectations on Almighty God. He works through fallible humans, but He is faithful never to disappoint us. None who waits for the Lord shall be put to shame.

God Completes the Good Work He Begins

What is this good work that we can be confident God is going to complete on the day of Jesus Christ?. What is it that Paul's referring to here? Well, broadly speaking, it's the work of being conformed to the image of the Son of God. Right now we call that work sanctification. And when it is completed, we call it glorification. The apostle John also gets us to look forward to that day when he writes “Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared. But we know there's that confidence. We know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we will see him as he is”. Friends, that's where you are headed if your faith is in Christ Jesus, this is where the story is headed. The day of Christ Jesus is that day where you are freed from sinning. The day where you have been fully conformed to the image of God as you've always, as we all have been designed to be. We will finally at long last be as God has intended. Now some of you perhaps are coming off a week of maybe some massive spiritual failures. And you may wonder, is this my story? Is this where I am headed? Is this promise for me? Friends, you need to know that even a seed of grace in the heart is enough to be confident of a full bloom of glory soon to come. Shame won't tell you that. Your sin won't tell you that. Satan won't tell you that. You might not even be telling yourself that. Perhaps the voice you hear instead sounds something like this. “Lost Cause. You're just a screw up. Over and over and over again you have disappointed God. Why would he stick with you when you seem to never stick with him? You're not worth God's time. And he should cut his losses and give up on you now.” Maybe that's the voice you hear. Friends, don't believe it. Let Paul's confidence be your confidence. That when God begins a work, He always brings it to completion. Leave here today being able to say that

the work which His goodness began, the arm of His strength will complete. His promise is yes and Amen, and He has never forfeited yet, and He's not going to start now. Again, I say we have every reason for such confidence when we place it in God and not in us. Because it is the very nature of God's being to finish what he starts.

The Lord Finishes What He Starts

Now that's not true about us, is it? I was acutely reminded of this fact as we got our house in Michigan ready to sell and look through, it seemed like in nearly every single room, I had a project that I had begun about seven years earlier that I did not finish. In the hallway there's an entire square of wall I didn't even paint because I didn't feel like moving the bookcase when I was painting the hallway. And I forgot about that until I moved the bookcases as we were getting ready to move. Of course, I couldn't find that paint color anymore. Why do we not finish the things we start? Well, it comes down to one of at least two reasons. One is we change our mind, right? It's a change in our thinking. We don't care anymore. We decide we're not interested in this particular project. We decide it wasn't the right decision to begin in the first place. You know, maybe you think, do I really want to revisit that? That college application had so many questions and essays and I don't really think I want to go to that school anymore. So we started it, but now we give it up. Or we can think of the writer who furiously types away several pages and then control-alt-delete. I decided I want to go in a different direction. A change of mind. Sometimes, though, the reason we give up on the good work that we begin is because we're just too weak. We're just not strong enough. We're not strong enough to complete the things that we know are good and are worthwhile. Why do we fail at diets and mess up on New Year's resolutions? It's not because we want to be unhealthy or we want to be undisciplined, it's just because we lack the willpower. We're not strong enough. Why do we give up on that? We're going to do a three mile jog and why do I give up at mile one? Because I'm tired. I don't want to do it. So either of these reasons prove a deficiency in either our planning, we start something that we decide later we shouldn't have begun, or it proves the deficiency in our strength. We're not strong enough. Friends, the reason God always completes to perfection the work He begins is because of His infinite wisdom and infinite power. God never second guesses His work. The mind of God and its perfection and its majesty and … it's hard to describe, right? The mind of God, it's so unlike ours. He always knows what He's doing. Spurgeon says "If He deemed it wise to begin, how could it be supposed that He would change and amend His resolve? There can be no conceivable reason for God leaving off a work. The same motive which dictated the commencement must still be in operation, for He's the same God, therefore must have the same result, namely continuing to do what He has done. In nothing doth Jehovah turn from His intent. God is able to see the beginning from the end. His wisdom, His infinite exhaustible wisdom is what determines the works that He will begin. And so, He always knows it is never a waste of time to begin it" Friend, Christian, you are not a waste of God's time. Your sin is telling you, "What am I doing? I'm such a disappointment." God is not thinking that. He knows where you're headed. He knows the work He's doing and He's saying it was a good investment of His time, of His love, of His grace, of His mercy to begin a work in you. He knows what He's doing. And dare we say that the Lord would ever give up a good work because He's not strong enough? Is anything too difficult for the Lord? And so, what confidence we can have even in the midst of spiritual struggles and failings, that the God who began grace in my heart will mature it until it is all and only glory. And that is a joyful thing.

God Completes His Work in the Church

But I close by saying it's not just a joy for the Christian as an individual. There's a joy for the church here, for the people of God corporately. Indeed, that is Paul's main point. We love this verse, verse six, but perhaps we too often forget the context or what Paul's really getting at. We individualize it and it's true enough. This is about God's work of sanctification unto glory in our own hearts, but it's also about the work that he's doing in Christians when they come together as a church because the “you” there in verse six, “That he who began a good work in you”, that “you”, it's plural. Now I've been told y'all isn't necessarily plural, it's all y'all. And then other people told me that's not right. So, you can debate amongst yourselves afterwards. But I think it would be fair enough to say really, Philippians 1:6 says “the good work that he began in all y'all, He will see to completion” because he's writing to the church. He's writing to a congregation. He's reminding this group of saints who are planted there in the midst of a hostile pagan culture daily facing threats from a spiteful world, to say nothing now of the threats of their own sinful flesh. And now on top of that, their beloved pastor is in prison. They're concerned over that. Paul is reminding these people that there is nothing that can stop the work that God is doing in their body, in their fellowship, in their communion. Matthew Henry says “He who hath planted Christianity in the world will preserve it. As long as the world stands, Christ will have a church. Until the mystery of God shall be finished and the mystical body completed.” God fulfills His ultimate purposes in the world through the ministry of His Church. It's the good work, that good work that God begins in the church. It's the good work of getting the Gospel out, bringing the lost in, building the saints up in the faith. That's all done through the church. And God does not give up on that work. And the Philippians were part of that work. And let me say, brothers and sisters, that Midway is a part of that work, too. I am not ignorant of the fact that there has been a lot of change happening in recent months here at this dear church. In fact, no one is more aware than I am of how those changes have brought a big sinner and a weak servant into your midst and even into your pulpit. And as we stand on the brink of a new chapter, there's excitement. I see it in your faces and I've heard it from many of you. I also know though, that there's fear. There's apprehension. There's confusion. For some, there's bewilderment. Maybe a sense of loss for others. And dear members of Midway, I would understand if some of you have been wondering over recent months, what in the world is the Lord up to here? And I'm not sure I can give you an answer. But by the authority of God's Word, I am sure of this. That He who began a good work in you, Midway Presbyterian Church, will see it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.