

## Chapel service message.

### Intro

Philippians is a favourite book of many Christians full of many quotable and memorable passages. It was written by Paul along with Timothy. It is a letter from Paul in prison in Rome. We're given insight into Paul's relationship with the Philippians. Sometimes we get a grumpy Paul who appears to be harsh and even a little judgemental in other letters, but this letter is warm: he wrote to friends. Encourage as we read the text through as a letter. You've been given this letter from one person to another – what does it say about them? What does it say about the sender and the recipients? What does it say about their relationship? What do you think prompted this letter to be written and sent? Let's read ...

### Philippians 1:1-11

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God's holy people 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.

### Thanksgiving and prayer

<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 and, 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.

<sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, <sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.

**Philippians can be summarised as being Paul's thanksgiving for, encouragement of, and exhortation to the suffering community of believers in Philippi, who are also experiencing some internal struggles.**

**It was written 62 AD:**

**Paul's second Missionary Journey where he went to Philippi was between 49-52ad.**

**Philippians written 62 so about 12 years after the start of the church. In between we have his third journey, to gather a collection for the Jerusalem Church, and a wee trip to prison in Rome. Eventually prison meant house arrest, with restricted movement, but not restricted in communication. Still we see his eagerness to get out to visit them again. So most likely the letter to the Philippians was sent from Rome.**

**The occasion? Epaphroditus, who had brought information about the church to Paul in prison and delivered their gift to him (2:30; 4:18), is about to return to Philippi, having now recovered from a nearly fatal illness (2:26-27)**

**Emphases in the letter? Paul's and the Philippians' partnership in the gospel; Christ as the key to all of life, from beginning to end; knowing Christ, by becoming like him in his death (sacrificing oneself for others); rejoicing in Christ even in suffering; unity through humility and love. Note the use of the word Gospel today and repeatedly through the letter. Note too Paul's passion for prayer evident in the reading today.**

**Paul writes to friends. He opens his heart to them (1:12-26 & 3:4-14).**

**Reveals what makes Paul tick – Christ Crucified, and raised from the dead (2:5-11)**

**Everything else a loss, final prize is Christ (3:4-14)**

**Actually, Paul writes with Timothy – who may very well have been the one who physically crafted the letter from Paul's dictation. The letter is sent to all the believers (saints) specially mentioning its leadership. The church we see after just 12 or so years has Overseers, (Episkopos/ Bishops) and Deacons. Some see beginning of the end for organisations when an organisation begins to structure itself, but in fact this is necessary. It was Paul's practice to organise leadership for the new churches which were planted through him. There were many threats to their survival and leadership was essential. Anyway, this is not the bureaucratic leadership which would later develop in the church, they were not bishops like we understand them.**

**Verses 3-5 Paul gives thanks for the church at Philippi. They have been a great help to help him in the spread of the gospel. They have supported him – with gifts, and by carrying on with the gospel Paul proclaimed. They had stayed true,**

they were living examples of God's gracious work. The whole letter has a tone of gratefulness. Paul is grateful: he gives thanks with joy for them and how they have helped in the spread of the gospel.

Paul is not putting himself down – he knows his place as an Apostle - but someone who knows who they are and is comfortable with it can see and be thankful for those who are around them. This is a mark of humility, seeing yourself and those around you in the bigger picture, like a sportsman who might have played an awesome game who acknowledges coaches and the team as a whole. As the All Blacks might say – no one is bigger than the team.

For Paul as we will see, he does not mind how the gospel gets out so long as it does. His passion is for people to know God's love.

With their participation in the gospel together in mind we move to verse 6.

He who began a good work in you – when he thinks back to their start, he thinks of how God gave him a dream where a man was begging them to come to Macedonia and they went. How he encountered Lydia, or the Lydian woman, a maker of fine purple cloth and how willingly she responded to the gospel; and all her household too. He remembers the girl with the evil spirit in her who annoyed him and how the demon was cast out of her which led to them being thrown in prison and the earthquake and their chains falling off and the jailer and all his household coming to faith. He might have said – when I remember how I planted the church in Philippi, but no he credits God who began a good work in you. Yes he was there willing, working, but it was God's work and not his and in fact when he looks at it it was not his idea in the first place to go to Philippi in Macedonia, he wanted to go to Asia Minor.

One of the principals of excellence we learn from the recent All Blacks is that they have a sense that they are playing for something bigger than personal achievement. They are playing for the pride of the jersey, for the team, they are representing the country. Their own achievements follow, but the main thing is the bigger picture: Its not all about them. Its seen as a mark of humility and respect for being an All Black.

Paul had this principle: He kept in clear focus: this is God's work. Even though he was there on the ground getting insulted and beaten but also seeing miracles at his hands ultimately it was God who planted the church at Philippi.

When we think about how our faith journey began and the people who have been helpful in the growth of our lives we can be thankful for the people who have helped us on the way, but more than this can we see how all along it has been God's work and the combined energies of the people who have been with us have added up to more than what each one contributed?

Confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Completion has a wonderful sense of finishing, of completeness, wholeness, of perfection in terms of maturity in Christ. As participators in the gospel God is faithfully working in our lives to bring us to completion. Yes we press on, but as we do God works to mature us.

And how does he mature us? So often it is through the relationships we have around us – especially in the church.

Paul's letter is friendly, but he also pokes gently at something which we can see is not right in Philippi as well. The Philippian Church was relatively calm and settled compared with the likes of what we read in Corinthians and Galatians where there seem to be conflicts everywhere. However, look at the last verses. <sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, <sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.

Why did he need to write that? We're not given insight here, but Epaphroditus brought news of the health of the church to Paul and obviously there is something there which needs some work in terms of their relationships together. That your love may abound in knowledge. Love is worked out in relationships. Knowledge is never about knowing for the sake of knowing something, it is knowledge in relationship. So as they abound in love for each other their knowledge would increase as to how to deal rightly with the niggles they were experiencing. Acting in love they would know the way.

The encouragement here is to see that love and righteousness go together. Loving actions and righteous actions are not opposites. If we truly love then our actions will be righteous in the good sense of the word. Right, just, true, honest. In the end we can assess many of our motives by the old adage; is it loving? If we pause before acting to ask ourselves this question then our actions will be pure and blameless before Christ and filled with the fruit of righteousness.

So we have 3 things to consider, who am I grateful to God for? What members of God's team have helped me to shine?

How do I see God's good work in me from beginning to now?

How might I need to insert into my practice the question over my behaviour – is it loving?

Prayer of response

