**Philippians 1:1-11 – Observations Of A Life That Pleases God**

We are beginning a series through the Book of Philippians. During Covid, we did a Wednesday night on-line study through this book, but we are going to now do it on Sunday morning, with some more depth and application, though we tried to do both on-line this is going to be different in some ways from that study. So, some who went through that with me this will sound familiar, but we will also add things.

Let me tell you just a little, not in great detail, about the city of Philippi. Paul started a church here in **Acts 16**. A strongly represented Roman city, it was not an easy place to start a church. It was named for Philip II of Macedon, who in the fourth century B.C. conquered the region because of nearby gold mines. In the second century B.C., Philippi became part of the Roman province of Macedonia.

It was located on a major road, the Egnatian Way, which connected the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire to Rome itself. It was a leading city in Macedonia. In 42 B.C. it was given status and autonomy, which was not granted to a lot of cities. The autonomy from the provincial government and people having the same rights as cities in Italy was huge. People could own their own property. They were exempt from paying poll and land taxes.

Their situation led to, what we could almost note, arrogance. Many Roman soldiers, upon leaving the Roman army, settled in Philippi. The church Paul started there was a mixture of races, culture, and social classes.

If you are like me, we appreciate good news. We do not get a lot of that in our world today. In **Philippians**, we find the word **“joy” or “rejoicing”** over 15x. This is important to note as we will see, especially given the background of the writer.

The year is 61 or 62 A.D. The author of this book, Paul, is in prison. His “crime” - he told others about Jesus. Instead of being fearful or complaining of the present or the future, Paul writes this letter to encourage the Philippian believers, and in turn, us, regarding our relationship with the Lord.

Paul had gone through many difficulties in his life. We can see that, for example, in **2 Cor. 11:23-33** he gives a laundry list of some of the things he encountered as a Christ follower. Countless beatings, imprisonment, beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, danger from robbers, Jews, and non-Jews.

**Point:** He dealt with false Christians. Sleepless nights, on and on. The church at Philippi, whom this letter was written to, had undergone, and possibly was going through at the time Paul wrote, persecution. As the church grew it became a threat to Rome, or so Rome thought. They became the target of Jews and non-Jews alike. And Nero was on the throne at this time, an unstable ruler, to say the least.

We begin with the introduction. In **vss. 1-2** it is important to note a couple of things. They apply to each of us today. **First**, Paul mentions that he and Timothy, who was with him at the time of Paul’s imprisonment, are **“servants”** of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A **“servant”** is one who gives themselves up to the will of another. They serve others. They put others above themselves. This is one of the themes of Philippians - servanthood. Paul is not complaining about being a servant of God. Though imprisoned, instead of becoming bitter, he used the situation to further God’s work in the world. God’s people are called **“servants”** in several places **(Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; 2 Tim. 2:24)**. There are expectations of God’s servants, how we live and what we say.

It is not a demeaning word. Paul, and us, are to serve out of privilege, not pressure, if I could put it that way. We serve as a way of saying “thank you” to God for the salvation that we have. That does not mean life will be easy and it leads to questions for myself to answer.

**The questions include,** “When I am serving others and helping them, what is my attitude. Am I frustrated because more people are not helping or doing something? (We find ourselves focusing on that). Are we serving because, well, we have to, or because God has led us to?

Paul calls the believers **“saints.”** I like the word. We are special to God and set apart for Him. We belong to the Lord. Paul also addresses the **overseers** **(elders, bishops, same office)** and **deacons (servant, one who carries out the commands of another)**. Here it is in the masculine gender. So, he is addressing some men in the church as well as the overseers, the elders. But in **Rom. 16:1**, this word for **“deacon”** is in the feminine gender and is speaking about Phoebe.

We are not here to debate deacons/deaconess. I think that one thing to keep in mind is that churches are made up of people (earth-shattering, isn’t it) and Paul is addressing the people and those in certain leadership roles at Philippi. He is not saying they are doing anything wrong, but he addresses everyone.

I want us to note a **second** point that is found in **vss. 1-2**. Not only is Paul okay with being a servant, but he is also okay with the position that Christ has over his life as Lord and Savior. Three times in vss. 1-2 Paul speaks about Jesus. And at the end of **vs. 2** he calls Christ the Lord.

He is a servant of Christ **(vs. 1**). The Christians at Philippi are **“saints”** because of their relationship with Jesus, and in Paul’s common greeting in **vs. 2** he notes that grace and peace come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Another point I want to make, and we will see this in the letter is that circumstances should not dictate our spiritual commitment.** I know that seems obvious but how often is that the case, where things around us determine how we act and respond.

In saying that, it reminds me that we all need an anchor for our life. An anchor would keep a boat from drifting in the harbor. Because of life situations, good and not so good, we all need a trustworthy source, an anchor to hold on to.

You might be raising kids. It is not easy. Your job is tough. You may be dealing with relationship issues. Money is tight. Are we allowing those challenges to dictate our serving of the Lord or more importantly, our belief that He is our anchor. He is the Lord, the Master, the CEO of our life. He is not going to leave us **(Heb. 13:5)**. And are we willing to deal with any attitudes or issues that God points out in our life that needs work.

Let us get to how God as our anchor helps us. For example, the Bible gives us guidance in raising our children. **Proverbs, Eph. 6** and stories and illustrations throughout the Bible give us insights into child raising. We cannot fix every issue in life, but we can choose too not be bitter. All of this, the application of the Bible to our life, will only happen if we trust in Jesus and anchor ourselves in Him as the Lord of our life. He is in charge.

Life is not always easy. We know that but we know we need help. By the way, everyone has an anchor. When life has bumps in the road, some people lean on themselves, others, or drugs, alcohol, a belief system, or practice, to get through. The fact is the issue comes down to this - your anchor is only as good as Who or what the anchor is. People will fail us, work may not last if that is our anchor. God is the one who provides stability to **“saints,”** set apart ones. He cares about us.

**As we continue in vss. 3-11, I want to ask another question of us** - Have we ever felt like we were not making a difference for the kingdom of God? Have you ever felt that way. Now, I do not know if the Philippian church ever asked itself that question, but I do know that they, as a church, were important to Paul, and he lets them know that in these verses. **What I do want us to do is make some observations about a life that pleases God and when we please Him, we can have influence in our world for His glory**.

I think we need to keep in mind that his encouragement to them is also for us. Let us just note some of what he says in **vss. 3-11**. That is where we now head for the rest of the morning.

**1) Being thankful can change our thinking.** In **vs. 3** Paul tells them that when he prays for them as a church, he is thankful for them. Now, this church did have a few problems like many churches do because people make up the church. But he was still thankful for them. He did not focus on the issues though he will deal with them, he focused on being thankful for this church and their part in helping get the message of Jesus out to others. God is using us in some way if we are following Him.

In **vs. 4** Paul says that this group of believers, as he prayed for them, brought him joy. He was thankful for them. Paul, in prison, prays for others. He is not complaining about his situation, he is not griping to God that he is getting a bad deal. His prayers are prayers of joy for others, and he remembers those who have touched his life and whose life he has touched.

**Practical:** Take time today to think of a person or two who has been a positive encouragement and influence in our life, whether in the good times or the difficult moments. And thank the Lord for bringing them into our life. Drop them a note. Show thankfulness. Some people never say “thank you” to others who have stepped up and helped them or done things for them. We need to do that. And pray for them.

**2) When we support each other, we further the kingdom.** That is the theme of **vs. 5**. Paul notes that this church was in **“partnership”** with him when it came to getting out the Gospel. There are different angles to this. We need to encourage and support each other. This may include confronting sin in the life of a fellow believer **(vs. 5)**. It means thanking them for what they are doing for God’s kingdom. It also means not being rude or disrespectful of others. We are a team; we need to act like it.

The word for **“partnership”** is the same word we get **“fellowship”** from. This church, because of their support of Paul and their own ministry, shared with Paul a closeness because of what they did together and for the same goal. This is the same word used in **Acts 2:42**.

**3) God is not done with us until we are in His presence.** Yes, we have said this before but **vs. 6** is a reminder of two things. **First**, God is doing a **“good work”** in our life. This has nothing to do with earning salvation. God is using us for His glory. We are not puppets and can choose to not follow Him. But never think we have nothing to offer the Lord when it comes to growing and serving Him.

Paul was **“sure” (confident, trust)** that God was doing this work in the lives of the believers. God is conforming us to the image of Christ **(Rom. 8:29)**.

**Second**, this good work that God is doing in our lives will be completed when Christ returns. The word **“completion” means “to bring to an end, accomplish, perfect, complete.”** God’s work will look different in each life, but God is working in us, molding us into the image of Christ. We do have a part to play as we shall see but this is a guarantee that God will finish what He has begun. God never leaves us “spiritually homeless.” He has made us His child and He will finish the work He has begun.

**4) We need to be prepared to explain what we believe.** Paul was thankful for this group that not only supported him in the furthering of the Gospel by being involved in that, but they also defended the truth of God **(vs. 7)**.

**Two key words in vs. 7 are “defense”** **(verbal defense - see Acts 25:16; 2 Tim. 4:16; 1 Peter 3:15)** and **“confirmation” (firm establishment)**. We need to know why we believe what we believe (this is crucial) and we need to firm in our commitment to the message of the Gospel. We know the message of the Gospel to be true - the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ **(1 Cor. 15)**. I also believe Paul has in mind the essential truths that make up the Christian faith **(note some of these)**.

We should know how to explain why we believe the Bible, Who Jesus is, Who God is. These are important. In the ancient world, Christians had to stand for truth, and they had to take on false teaching and we must do the same today. Some of the writings of the early church “fathers” were defending Christianity against wrong teaching.

Another thing that jumps out at me from **vs. 7** is that this church did not forget Paul when he was in prison. They were close to Paul, no matter the situation. They stood with him while he was imprisoned, and while he both defended and taught the Word. We need to be the same way with one another and with brothers and sisters who are in difficult situations, who need to know we are there for them.

Drop a note, make a call, pray for them. It makes an enormous difference in someone’s life just to know someone cares.

**5) We need to be people marked by love, spiritual knowledge, and discernment.** Look with me at **vss. 9-11**. The love that Paul prays for this church to have is not only showing God’s love to each other, but to the broken world around them.

**Point:** Love is an action word. We care for others, we forgive, we serve the Lord and individuals. And we do so without expecting anything in return. We love because we are called to this as an expectation from God Who has changed our heart.

We need the knowledge of the Word of God and the ability to discern truth from error, fake from fact. In showing God’s love to others, we still need wisdom because some people will use us to get things, to further their agenda. We need discernment to know a real need from being used by others. Love also confronts when necessary.

Knowledge is not mere intellectual assent to something we read and learn though that is important. It has a close connection to true faith in the right thing or Person, in this case that being Christ.

We do fulfill **Mt. 22:37-40** when we love God and others. But I still believe in discernment in helping people because we are not to be taken advantage of just because someone thinks we should do something for them.

Discernment has to do with life choices. Paul prays for them, and it would be the same for us, that the Philippian believers make morally right decisions. **Heb. 5:14** tells us that growing Christians **“train”** themselves to know right from wrong. It takes work, time, and the Holy Spirit to get to get to this point. Even in loving God and others we need to be discerning, to show the love of God in the right ways with the right attitudes.

It is easy to simply go through the motions and help someone when in our hearts we may not think too highly of them or the situation. It can be tough. Yet, we are to love them and to love God. This is where the motive and attitude check comes in.

**6) Our reputation does matter.** The church at Philippi, I believe, had a good reputation in a difficult city. Note **Phil. 1:10**. In **vs. 10** the word **“approve”** means **“to test, examine, scrutinize” something to make sure it is genuine**. This builds off **vs. 9** of being knowledgeable and discerning.

We will know what is Biblical and what is not because we have grown in our knowledge of the Word and we are discerning people and what they are saying, and we guard against false teaching and untruths.

The result is that we evaluate things by the Word, so that we know what is **“excellent.”** **This word has the idea, and it is connected to discerning and testing or approving things, of distinguishing between good and evil, lawful, and unlawful**. God’s Word is the tool we use to do this.

**Note:** We determine what is superior, what is of greater value, what is best, as we discern. We follow God’s lead in our life, which means we follow what the Word of God says and expects of us.

Then Paul tells us in **vs. 10** how that is seen in our lives. The word **“pure” means “sincere, spotless.”** It has the idea of something found pure when unfolded and examined by the sun’s light. This can cover every area of our life. Are we sincere, are we holy, free from false living and wrong thinking. If not, then we need to examine our heart, right now, right here.

The word **“blameless”** has to do with not being led into sin, not stumbling, being unblameable by how we live. Our moral life is in line with truth. This comes from knowledge and discernment and by knowing what is excellent, testing what we hear and see. We will not try to cause others to stumble in their walk with God. We will be sensitive to them and the things with which they may struggle.

**7) We are to be the most trustworthy people around.** **Vs. 11** is a result of **vss. 9-10** and **vs. 11** tells us that we are to live ethical lives. That is the idea of the word **“righteousness”** that we read here. It has to do with our thinking, how we act, that we handle life properly. This word covers so much. **Rom. 14:17** tells us that the Holy Spirit can help us live this type of life. See also **1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 3:16**.

**Point:** As Christians, we should manage our business in the right way. Pay our bills. Treat people the right way. Stand for truth, which I think is part of correct thinking. Be kind. Just be difference makers to the best of our ability. **Rom. 6:13** tells us that because of our new life in Christ, this is a choice we make and are expected to make. Instead of sinning, do the right thing. And we can do that with God’s help.

Let us learn from what Paul writes in these first eleven verses.