

LOVE THAT ABOUNDS

Philippians 1:1-11

"Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 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; 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. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

In looking at what passage of Scripture to use for today, I went through my list of past, used Scriptures from previous messages and realized that we hadn't up until now looked at the book of Philippians. What was unusual to me about that is, not only do I quote from Philippians frequently, but Philippians is arguably one of the most quoted books in the New Testament, second only to possibly to the book of Romans or the book of John. Regardless to how true that statement is, Philippians has many great quotable nuggets of teaching wisdom, that gets quoted all the time (me included). What we'll see in this letter to the Philippians is that it encompasses the will of God for us in that last sentence, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense **till the day of Christ**, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, [here it is] **to the glory and praise of God.**" And then, not only is all of God's creation to the glory and praise of God but that, as Jesus said, "**Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.**" (Luke 12:32) So then, as all of God's creation is for His glory and praise, God is preparing us, in Christ Jesus, to inherit His eternal kingdom; and to be joint heirs with Jesus! (Romans 8:17)

What information we can find from the historical books outside of the Bible, and then also from the narrative in the book of Acts, Philippi had some notably interesting times in their history as well. And really what we see in all things considered, is that where God is working His will and purpose, we always see opposing forces at work to steal, kill, and destroy as Jesus put it. But, Praise be to God our Father, for there is a victor in this great and epic battle of good and evil, and His name is Jesus! The world and those who dwell on it have been fighting and raging and struggling for a purpose and we can see an interesting slice of the drama from what has taken place at Philippi-to which the Apostle Paul brought the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The mystery of what it all means has been revealed, that Jesus is THE Christ, the Son of the Living God, as the Apostle Peter exclaimed (**Matthew 16:16, John 6:69**). The enemy of our souls is set on stealing our joy and the truth within us, to destroy our faith, and ultimately to bring about our demise. But then as Jesus more fully said, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (**John 10:10**)

Philippi was a Roman colony in northeastern Greece where Paul had his first converts to Christianity in what is considered Europe. This was on Paul's second missionary journey. Paul had a vision of a man saying to come to Macedonia. As my mind sometimes looks for the good or comedy in situations, perhaps as a defense mechanism, or possibly due to me watching too many comedy movies, I imagined a guy sitting in a lounge chair on the beach, with a cool drink in his hand and sitting under an umbrella and wearing colorful beach attire, looking over in the vision toward Paul and saying, "come to Macedonia, you'll love it!" The reality though of what was going on is that the Holy Spirit had just previously forbidden them to go to what was called Asia, which is present-day Turkey. So then after Paul had received that vision, he and Silas, and Timothy headed to Macedonia. The first city they went to in Macedonia was Philippi. Lydia, a seller of purple (that's all it says-I'm guessing she used a special purple dye to use on different fabrics) and her family are mentioned as Paul and Silas' first converts. (**Acts 16:14-15**) As a side note, we had gone to the beach one day, years ago, and all along the beach were these small purple snails, and when we picked them up they excreted a purple liquid on our hands. Anyways, after Lydia and her family accepted Christ, the story tells of Paul having commanded a demon to come out of a girl who had a spirit of divination. She had made much money on fortune-telling for her masters, or what I suppose you could call her employers, and so, since the masters of that girl weren't going to be making any more money off that girl, Paul and Silas were dragged to the magistrates and whipped and thrown into prison. But as the story goes, while Paul and Silas were singing and praising God, there was a great earthquake and the prison doors were opened. Before the prison guard could kill himself in shame for letting the

prisoners escape, long-story shortened, Paul let the jailer know that no one had escaped and then the guard asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." and so the jailer took them to his home to get the wounds cleaned up and then he and his family were saved and baptized. (**Acts 16**) So that is some backstory, biblically on Philippi. Paul had visited Philippi on his third and last missionary journey but nothing is mentioned about the details of that visit.

Historically, that is, in historical documents outside of the Bible, Philippi was founded by Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. By founded, that means he had defeated the people from there and renamed the city after himself. It is also the place of the famous battle of Antony and Brutus. Brutus is known to be part of the plot to kill Julius Caesar, in the Shakespeare play, where Caesar is stabbed and dying, he sees Brutus and says, "et tu Brute?" or "you too Brutus?" I have read elsewhere that he didn't really say that but he said, "you too my son!" Soon after the battle at Philippi, Brutus realizes his ultimate defeat and he kills himself, to which this battle paved the way for Octavian (who became Caesar Augustus) to become the first Roman emperor. Yes, he is the same Caesar Augustus who called for a census at the time of Jesus' birth. So, of course this letter to Philippi follows that bit of secular history and then soon after in history was the life and death and then resurrection of Jesus. Then after Paul's missionary journeys had ended he was then imprisoned in Rome. That brings us to the place of Paul writing the letter to the Philippians.

Our passage of Scripture for today starts off with, "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." No one really ever attests the writing of this letter to Timothy, as being with Paul, yet nevertheless, there's his name. They greet all the saints in Philippi along with the bishops and deacons. Many, if not most, scholars agree that the term bishop is interchangeable with elder and pastor. They were the overseers of the church. While I don't intend for this message to elaborate on church management and structure, I'll simply say that the raising of the status of bishops in the early church and really the establishing of the pope came about through the years of conflict within the church dealing with doctrinal issues and then of the combining of church and state in purpose. Sadly, what we know from history is that as many bishops were elevated in status and the church and state colluded and were melded together, there were some good times and then some very bad times and there were some good church leaders and then some not so good ones.

The Apostle John addressed that issue in a way when he said in **1 John 2:26-27**, "These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him." Yes, we can all learn from the same source, the Holy Bible through the wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit. Yet, at the same time, we can't take that Scripture out of context to say that we can't learn from one another, or from teachers, or pastors, or evangelists. After all, as Paul says in **1 Corinthians 12:28** "God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues." In that chapter Paul says that we have differing gifts and calling from God but that it is all for the benefit of each other. Paul then goes on to say that the greatest gift is...LOVE! (**1 Corinthians 13**)

The deacons we know from the book of Acts were established due to the insufficiency in the church in meeting the needs of the widows. But, we know also reading along in the book of Acts, that those deacons who were appointed to meet the needs of the widows were also involved in...preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Stephen, who was preaching the gospel or good news of Jesus Christ was hauled before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council, and then proceeded to preach Christ to them and was then stoned to death. Philip, preached the gospel to those in Samaria, the enemies of the Jews, and many believed on Christ there, and then Philip led an Ethiopian eunuch to Christ while he was riding along in his chariot. Later in **Acts 21:8** Philip was referred to as "Philip, the evangelist who was one of the seven [that is, one of the seven deacons]." The point is, the bishops, or pastors, the deacons, the evangelists, the saints, are all called into the body of Christ and we all have the great blessed opportunity to be part of God's building His eternal kingdom, in Christ Jesus. We all can gain the same wisdom from the Holy Spirit through the reading of His Word. We all fit into the body of Christ and we all have gifts and a calling from God according to His purpose. After the letter opens as a greeting, it says, "Grace to you and peace from **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**" There's our real focus in all that matters. There is but one sovereign God and only one Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and then of course we also have one Holy Spirit that guides us into all truth, as Jesus put it (**John 16:13**), and as the apostle John stated, and "these three are one". (**1 John 5:7**)

As I mentioned earlier about Philippians having many quotable verses, **Philippians 2:12-13** says "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; **for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.**"

That is an important reminder to all of us. "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (**1 Corinthians 6:20**) There is but one head of the body of Christ and that is Jesus Himself, and then there is us, his body working together in His eternal purpose. "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created." (**Revelation 4:11**)

In our opening passage, Paul (and Timothy) give us one of the many much quoted passages of Scripture saying, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ". (**Philippians 1:6**) In full context it says, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, **for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 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." What Paul is saying here is, as they have proven themselves to be remaining in the faith AND in the fellowship of the gospel, that he is confident that God WILL complete what he has started. Complete what? He is making us into the image of Christ Jesus. That leads us to another much quoted passage of Scripture in Philippians, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (**Philippians 2:5-8**) Those two were in last weeks message on the importance in knowing "What We Believe". Those two passages of Scripture tell those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ that we are then led by the Holy Spirit to follow in Jesus' example, to be like Christ by humbling ourselves before God Almighty as He leads us in His Spirit, even if that means being led to die for our faith. Hopefully it won't come to that, but then again a great reward is promised those who are persecuted for their faith in Christ. (**Matthew 5:12**) We are part of the body of Christ! We are to be One in Christ, for all of eternity! In that great promise from God, we can be confident in knowing that what God has begun in us, He will complete it! He has gotten us this far, for God will not forsake His own children! (**Hebrews 13:5**)

When we believe on Jesus Christ, for dying on the cross for our sins, and that He took our sins upon Himself on that cross, and that He rose from the grave on the third day, conquering death, and that we too who believe on Christ and have received Him into our hearts, will have our bodies raised from the grave unto eternal life in Christ. Just as Jesus spoke of His purpose on this earth, He said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God

did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:16-17)

The "gospel in a nutshell" as I call it is what Paul said in **1 Corinthians 15:3-8**, "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time." We have Christ Jesus, who died on a cross for our sins, which was God's wisdom in reconciling us back into a right relationship with Him, so that we can have eternal life in Christ Jesus. Only the Righteousness of God could do that. It had to come from Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, who was born of a virgin by the the Holy Spirit, and came into the world as a baby, He lived a sinless life-how? He was fully man but He was also fully God. God did all that so that we can be the Family of God! How incredibly amazing and awesome is that? Do you believe that?

So when we believe on Jesus Christ for dying on the cross for our sins, we receive His Holy Spirit in our hearts, as God seals us in Christ Jesus as a guarantee (**2 Corinthians 1:22**) We are then "born again" as Jesus put it. Jesus elaborates by saying, "**so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.**" (**John 3:8**) That is where we become a child of God, born into the family of God! Then we can truly proclaim, one of the other much quoted verses of Philippians, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (**Philippians 4:13**) Does that make all of the troubles go away? Does that mean we become rich and prosperous and never have any needs? In context, Paul says prior to that, "I know how to be abased (which means humbled or degraded), and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**" Speaking of needs, here is another much quoted verse toward the end of the letter to the Philippians, "And my God shall supply all your need **according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.**" (**Philippians 4:19**) Jesus stated , "**For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.**" (**Matthew 6:8**)

It really is a matter of perspective. Most of the time, or maybe all the time, when we get frustrated, when we feel we have a need that we haven't received, our focus may not be aligned properly. Here's one more much quoted verse from Philippians, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be

conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself." (**Philippians 3:20-21**) First and foremost our focus is to be on Jesus. Jesus promised, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (**Matthew 6:33**) "And my God shall supply ALL your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Once again, God is preparing us for our place, in Christ, together as the body of Christ, in His eternal Kingdom. Many have already come and gone before us, such as all the apostles, and all of the great multitude that have preceded us are a testimony to us, a message of hope, an assurance that we too will be in His eternal kingdom. "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (**Hebrews 12:1-2**) This is a race, so to speak, but it many times seems like a long distance race. Maybe it seems like a slow crawl on your knees from one end of the earth to the other. Nevertheless, we are encouraged by Paul (and/or Timothy) in one more much quoted passages in Philippians to "press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (**Philippians 3:14**)

The whole world can be falling apart around us, and we could be at the place where Jesus said, "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold", (**Matthew 24:12**) but we are encouraged by the Apostle Paul to keep pressing on, relying on Christ, who is our source of strength and as he said to the Philippians, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." Once more, as I use this passage of Scripture frequently, "But of [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**), and then as Paul said to the folks in Philippi I say to you, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 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." Thank You Lord Jesus!

Heavenly Father,
I confess that I have sinned against You.
I ask that You forgive me of my sins.
I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins,
I confess with my mouth that Jesus is my Lord,
and I believe in my heart that You raised Jesus from the dead,
so that I can have forgiveness of sins,
and be reconciled to You, God, My Father.
I now commit to You, that I will repent of my sins,
and live in the newness of life,
being led by Your Holy Spirit,
all this I pray, in Christ Jesus, my Savior and Lord. Thank You Lord!